



SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' BELIEFS, VALUE SYSTEMS AND
PRACTICES REGARDING THE TEACHING OF COMPREHENSIVE
SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION

MASTER OF EDUCATION (EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY) THESIS

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the text of this thesis is substantially my own work and has not been used for any other award at the University of Malawi or any other university.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my father, Mr. Albert Banda, and my mother, Justina Mvula-Banda. They have always shown me love, support and understanding throughout all my academic life.

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ABSTRACT

The study explored secondary school teachers' beliefs, values, and practices in teaching Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) within Life Skills Education, to understand how they navigate this sensitive area. The central question was: "What are the secondary school teachers' beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of CSE in Life Skills Education?" A qualitative phenomenological design captured teachers' perspectives through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with fourteen purposefully selected participants from eight secondary schools in Dowa District. The study had six key findings. Firstly, teachers held positive attitudes towards CSE, though their views on its importance varied. Secondly, teachers' beliefs and values influenced the teaching of CSE. Thirdly, pedagogical approaches differed, with some using traditional lecturing and others favouring learner-centred discussions. Fourthly, challenges included student shyness, teachers' negative perceptions, inadequate materials, curriculum age-inappropriateness, and linguistic/cultural barriers. Fifthly, handling sensitive questions varied, with some teachers responding publicly, others privately, and some needing more time to research before providing feedback. Lastly, none of the Life Skills teachers held a tertiary qualification in the subject, including CSE. The study recommends offering tertiary-level training and regular Continuous Professional Development to enhance teachers' CSE knowledge, skills, and instructional methods for successful curriculum implementation. Future research could explore students' and parents' perceptions of CSE in schools as this study only involved secondary school teachers.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS:	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BED:	Bachelor of Education
CDSS:	Community Day Secondary School
CEED:	Central East Education Division
CPD:	Continuous Professional Development
CSE:	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSS:	Conventional Secondary school
DipEd:	Diploma of Education
EMIS:	Education Management Information System
FAWEMA:	Forum for African Women Educationalists in Malawi
FHI:	Family Health International
FPAM:	Family Planning Association of Malawi
HIV:	Human Immune-deficiency Virus
ISAMA:	Independent Schools Association of Malawi
LGBT:	Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender
MIE:	Malawi Institute of Education
MoEST:	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
Pvt.:	Private
SCOM:	Student Christian Organization of Malawi
SHR:	Sexual and Reproductive Health
TTC:	Teachers Training College
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIMAREC:	University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee
YCS:	Young Christian Students

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Overview

This section presents the background information and context of the study, highlighting the need for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in schools, CSE in Malawi's education system, CSE key implementational challenge in schools and the teachers' role in the implementation of CSE. The section also presents the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study, definition of key terms, and the structure of the thesis. The section concludes with a chapter summary.

1.1 The Need for CSE in Schools

The need for CSE in schools has become indispensable in today's contemporary society (Jimmy et al., 2013; Mukau & Nichols, 2024). Primarily, this is due to the rise of new digital technologies and widespread internet access, which has fundamentally changed how young people learn about sex and navigate their sexual lives (Pound et al., 2017). While these information sources can be valuable, they are often inconsistent or poor, and usually provide conflicting and confusing messages about sexuality (De Hass & Hutter, 2019). Furthermore, young people today find themselves in a shifting sexual landscape due to changing attitudes towards sexuality, greater variation in sexual behaviour, and increased gender equality (Pound et al., 2017). These factors, exacerbated by the silence and disapproval surrounding open discussions about sexual

matters by adults, leave young people potentially vulnerable to coercion, abuse, exploitation, unintended pregnancy, and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), including HIV (UNESCO, 2009).

This is why CSE has emerged as “one of the most important tools to ensure that young people have the information they need to make healthy and informed choices” (Parker et al., 2009, as cited in Krebbekx, 2019, p. 1326). According to UNESCO’s (2018) International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach, CSE is “a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality” (p. 6). It is “education about all matters relating to sexuality and its expression” (Leung et al., 2019, p. 3). By providing a holistic and participatory learning experience (Browes, 2015), CSE empowers students with the knowledge and skills they need to foster positive attitudes towards sexuality and make informed decisions about their sexual lives (Zinyane, 2022).

CSE acknowledges the social determinants of health, such as culture, gender, power dynamics, and poverty, which can all influence young people's sexual behaviour and increase their risk for negative outcomes (Ocran, 2021). Although sex education is not universally adopted (Jimmy et al., 2013), it forms part of the national school curricula of most Sub-Saharan African countries (Wood & Rolleri, 2014).

1. 2 CSE in Malawi’s Education System

In Malawi’s educational system, CSE is delivered in-school (Malata et al., 2023) mainly through the Life Skills Education curriculum introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2002 (Rashid & Mwale, 2016; UNESCO, 2021). This curriculum aims to empower children and young people to effectively deal with the nation’s social and health

problems, including the fight against HIV infections (Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014; Kalanda, 2010; Rashid & Mwale, 2016; UNESCO, 2021).

As reported by Rashid and Mwale (2016), risky sexual behaviour among schooling youths is still at its peak in Malawi, and this has resulted in the highest HIV prevalence rates, estimated at 8.9% for the general population, with one in three new HIV infections occurring among adolescents and youth aged 15–24 years. Adolescent pregnancy rates are also high, with 141 births per 1000 girls, which is three times higher than the global average (Nash et al., 2019). It is thus understood that the country “recognized the need and entitlement of all young people” to CSE (UNESCO, 2009, p. 9).

1.3 Key CSE Implementational Challenge in Schools

According to Malata et al. (2023), the problem with CSE, however, is that it remains a controversial topic in Malawi and has thus suffered resistance from both cultural and religious groups. Sexuality education in the country is seen as a taboo, and adolescents are generally discouraged from accessing sexual health information. The prevailing belief is that sex education might lead young people to earlier exploration and experimentation with sex (Nash et al., 2019) because learners tend to practice what they have learned, especially since boys and girls are taught together (Likupe et al., 2020). It has thus been argued that this leads to the privation of childhood innocence (Mukonka et al., 2023).

This belief, though prevalent in most of the Sub-Saharan African countries (Jimmy et al., 2013; Mukonka et al., 2023; Shegesha, 2015), directly contradicts the findings of several studies that have shown that sexuality education does not lead to early sexual debuts. Rather, it promotes sexual health by ensuring that young learners have the

opportunity to develop a positive and factual view of sexuality and sexual health (Olufadewa et al., 2021).

Zulu et al. (2019) observe that the community resistance towards sexuality education only presents a challenge for teachers who must navigate their personal beliefs and professional responsibilities. On the one hand, they are supposed to convey knowledge and stimulate reflections as described in the curriculum. On the other hand, they are expected to have a broader role vis-à-vis their pupils, guiding them in accordance with social and cultural norms and values. This dilemma puts teachers in an awkward position as they struggle to balance between teaching sexuality education to their pupils and maintaining the broader parental role of shaping them into responsible adults (Shibuya et al., 2023; Zulu et al., 2019).

This assertion is supported by the findings of Chawhanda et al. (2021), who assessed the level of CSE provision in schools across ten sites in six Southern African countries, including Malawi. In this study, it was established that teachers prioritised non-sensitive relationship and personal skills topics while avoiding those deemed sensitive, such as sexual health, abortion, condom use, gender diversity, and human rights. According to Chawhanda et al., this avoidance stemmed from the perception that these topics contradict their communities' cultural and religious values.

This discomfort teachers feel contributes to lack of or scant attention to teaching of sexuality education (Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014), thereby leaving many young people without adequate preparation for their sexual lives (UNESCO, 2009). This is a drawback to successfully implementing the school-based sexuality education programmes (Glover & Macleod, 2016).

1.4 Teachers' Role in the Implementation of CSE

Several studies have established that teachers are major stakeholders in delivering comprehensive, reliable and non-judgmental sex education (Eisenberge et al., 2011; Olufadewa et al., 2021; Venketsamy, 2023). In Kenya, for example, Wanje et al. (2017) found that parents preferred sex education to be taught by school teachers. Some fathers admitted that they do not have close relationships with their daughters due to cultural and religious reasons, which negatively affects communication on sexual health and relationships.

In Japan, Hashimoto et al. (2012) found that parents preferred that the physiological aspects of humans be taught in school rather than at home. Due to the quantitative nature of the study, the reason for this was not, of course, adequately explored (Olufadewa et al., 2021).

In Malawi, Nash et al. (2019) reported that many parents delay discussions on sexuality education, fearing that this may lead to precocious sexual exploration (Kangaude, 2021). They instead believe that teachers are better suited for this role (Nash et al., 2019). Other studies have also indicated that students perceive teachers as more credible and trustworthy sources of sexuality education (Olufadewa et al., 2021).

Despite this consensus on the importance of teachers in sexuality education, understanding their perspectives is crucial. As Eisenberg et al. (2011) point out, effective improvements in sexuality education depend on understanding how teachers navigate these sensitive topics and the challenges they face in balancing their personal beliefs with curriculum requirements.

1.5 Problem Statement

Malawi faces significant public health challenges, including a high rate of adolescent pregnancy (141 births per 1,000 women, three times the global average), early marriage (47% before age 18 and 12% before age 15), and HIV/AIDS prevalence of 8.9%, with one in three new infections occurring among youth aged 15-24 (Nash et al., 2019; Malata et al., 2023). To address these issues, the Malawian government, through the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, introduced Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) into the Life Skills curriculum (Kalanda, 2010; Malata et al., 2023). This curriculum includes lessons designed to help learners understand their sexuality and develop life skills that will enable them to lead healthy and meaningful lives (Malata et al., 2019).

While studies have established that the implementation of CSE has encountered resistance in the country, primarily from cultural and religious groups (Malata, et al., 2023), there appears to be a gap in research exploring teachers' specific beliefs, value systems and practices regarding teaching CSE (Chawhanda et al., 2021).

Given the crucial role teachers play in effective CSE implementation (Eisenberg et al., 2011; Venketsamy, 2023), this lack of information regarding their perspectives presents an important gap in understanding the features and factors most conducive to effective provision of sexuality education to students (Eisenberg et al. (2011). Therefore, this study sought to explore teachers' beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of CSE in Life Skills Education in Malawi, to understand how teachers balance their personal beliefs and professional responsibilities.

1.6 The Purpose of the Study

This study sought to explore teachers' beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of CSE in Life Skills education in secondary schools.

1.6.1 Main Research Question

The central question for this study was: "What are teachers' beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of CSE in Life Skills Education?"

1.6.2 Research Questions

Outlined below were the sub-research questions:

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of the teaching of CSE in schools?
2. How do cultural morality frameworks influence the teaching of CSE in Life Skills?
3. How do teacher's beliefs and value systems affect their CSE instructional practices and the challenges they face in its instruction?
4. How do teachers navigate and address students' sexually sensitive questions?
5. How are Life Skills teachers prepared to effectively teach CSE?

1.7 Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study have added knowledge on the teachers' own perspectives on the teaching of CSE within the context of Life Skills education since they were given an opportunity to clarify and talk about their own beliefs and experiences of the teaching of CSE. The study is also imperative as its recommendations inform policymakers about the need for designing effective teacher training and support programmes for CSE implementation in Malawi. Lastly, findings from this study also inform teachers and school administrators about the need for creating school environments that support CSE delivery.

1.8 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The following were the limitations and delimitations of this study:

1.8.1 Limitations

This study encountered some limitations. Firstly, the researcher relied on self-reported accounts rather than observing Life Skills teachers' actual practices. Consequently, some teachers may have responded in a socially desirable manner. Therefore, the veracity of these self-reported data could not be validated. Secondly, although the researcher aimed for an equal number of male and female respondents, most participants were male. Therefore, the results may primarily reflect the views of male teachers and not necessarily those of female teachers.

1.8.2 Delimitations

The study focused on the teachers' beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of CSE in Life Skills Education. Therefore, the study is limited to the views of Life Skills teachers and does not include the perspectives of other equally important stakeholders like students, parents and school administrators. This study's focus was intentionally narrowed to provide a concentrated analysis of teachers' experiences.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

The following definitions clarify the key terms as they are used in this study:

1.9.1 Beliefs (Teachers' Beliefs)

In this study, teachers' beliefs refer to their individual views on the appropriateness, relevance, and effectiveness of CSE content (Silzer, 2016), and how teaching CSE aligns with their understanding of their professional role (Zulu et al., 2019). These beliefs are considered the teachers' personal thought processes regarding CSE.

1.9.2 Value Systems (Teachers' Value Systems)

Teachers' value systems, as defined in this study, represent their deeply held principles, moral standards, and ethical considerations that influence their attitudes and practices related to the teaching of CSE (Mkumbo, 2012). This includes their perceptions of cultural norms, religious convictions, and personal moral frameworks that shape their judgments about the content and delivery of CSE (Mahoso & Finestone, 2023).

1.9.3 Cultural Morality Frameworks

In the context of this study, Cultural Morality Frameworks refer to a collection of beliefs, values and ethical principles of what constitute right or wrong in relation to sex education (Mkumbo, 2012).

1.9.4 Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)

For the purpose of this study, CSE is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality (UNESCO, 2018). It is education about all matters relating to sexuality and its expression (Leung et al., 2019).

1.9.5 Life Skills Education

In this context, Life Skills Education refers the curriculum introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2002 (Malata et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2021) with the aim of empowering children and young people to effectively deal with the nation's social and health problems, including the fight against HIV infections (Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014; Rashid & Mwale, 2016).

1.9.6 Schemas

Schemas are the mental frameworks that influence how teachers perceive, interpret, and respond to the challenges and opportunities associated with teaching CSE. This study

has identified religious, gender norm, and societal taboo schemas as having significant influences on Life Skills teachers (De Hass & Hutter, 2019).

1.9.7 *Instructional Practices*

In this study, instructional practices refers to the methods, strategies, and techniques employed by Life Skills teachers in the delivery of CSE within the framework of Life Skills Education (Chavula et al., 2022). This encompasses their actions and decisions in the classroom (Pound et al., 2017).

1.10 Thesis Structure

This study has five chapters. Chapter One provides background information; Chapter Two reviews relevant literature; Chapter Three presents the research methodology; Chapter Four presents findings and discussion; and Chapter Five summarises the study findings, offers conclusions, implications of the study findings and suggested areas for further research.

1.11 Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter outlines the necessity and challenges surrounding CSE in Malawi. It begins by highlighting the critical need for CSE, integrated into the Life Skills Education curriculum, to address pressing issues such as adolescent pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. As discussed, cultural and religious sensitivities hinder CSE implementation, forcing teachers to navigate a conflict between their personal beliefs and professional duties. This chapter also discusses the purpose and significance of this research, provides definitions of key terms as used in this study, and outlines the structure of the thesis. The following chapter presents a review of the literature concerning the teaching of CSE.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Overview

This section offers an overview of existing literature concerning the teaching of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) within the context of Life Skills Education. It includes local and international literature based on the research questions the study sought to answer. The section also presents the Cultural Schema Theory, as espoused by Nishida (1999), as a theoretical framework for describing teachers' beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of the CSE within the context of Life Skills Education.

2.1 Teachers' Perceptions of the Teaching of CSE in Schools

Although teachers in various studies have demonstrated a varied understanding of CSE, they have uniformly affirmed its importance. They have noted that CSE encompasses sex education that equips learners with the necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills for making informed decisions about their sexual health (Mukau & Nichols, 2024). They have expressed concerns about early pregnancies, STIs, and sexual abuse, which they feel can be effectively addressed through CSE (Guttmacher Institute, 2010; Mahoso & Finestone, 2023). In Ngubane-Mokiwa and Mji's (2017) study, for example, South African teachers recognised the importance of CSE in addressing issues such as HIV/AIDS and teen pregnancy. Similarly, in Kenya, some teachers support CSE as a means to address adolescent sexual health issues (Obare et al., 2012).

This existing body of work highlights a crucial aspect that may affect the effective delivery of CSE: teachers' beliefs about the purpose and necessity of CSE. Understanding these foundational beliefs is essential to understanding their broader value systems regarding CSE (De Hass & Hutter, 2019). As put by Mukau and Nichols (2024), if teachers firmly believe in the importance of CSE for addressing critical issues, it will likely shape their attitudes towards its delivery, even if they have other concerns. It is no wonder that one of the critical focuses of this study was to understand teachers' perceptions of the teaching of CSE in schools.

Despite the general appreciation of the CSE program in schools, some studies have pointed out that teachers' attitudes toward CSE are largely influenced by debates surrounding the curriculum's content and its appropriateness for different age groups (Mukau & Nichols, 2024). Recognising this, Mukau and Nichols emphasise the crucial need to design CSE programs in a way that respects and considers the cultural and religious beliefs of specific societies in order to gain community acceptance.

2.2 The Influence of Cultural Morality Frameworks on the Teaching of CSE

Cultural norms are a community's prevalent customs, practices, and characteristics (Khuzwayo & Taylor, 2018, as cited in Adekola & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2023). They are the known triggers of moral panic and may affect every aspect of implementing sexuality education (UNESCO, 2019). According to De Haas & Hutter (2019), school-based sexuality education programs are more likely to be successfully implemented when teachers feel confident and comfortable teaching them. On the other hand, teachers can feel discomfort teaching sexuality education if there is a conflict between the content of CSE programs and their sociocultural or religious beliefs (Helleve et al., 2009).

They are reluctant to teach all aspects of sex education due to the fear of parental and community backlash. This reluctance stems from the fact that some communities have not accepted the teaching of sex education, viewing it as an encroachment on their culture and religious beliefs (Francis, 2013). According to Olowu (2015), this reluctance is sometimes reinforced by the teachings of some religious organisations that trigger distrust of key messages of the school-based sexuality education curriculum, like contraception, gender diversity, and gender equality, which seem to be offensive to their beliefs and doctrine.

This often results in teachers only focusing on abstinence-only messages and being reticent about safe-sex practices (De Haas & Hutter, 2019). They perceive it as their duty to bring up morally-upright citizens and to support students to finish their education and attain a better future (Adekola & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2021). To them, students' character and morality are core issues (Leung et al., 2019). Few teachers are prepared to present sex as both risky and pleasurable, a more balanced approach likely to meet the needs of youth (Leung et al., 2019).

In Ghana, for example, a review of sex education policy implementation at the Senior High School level showed that while teachers believed that young people should be taught about sexuality and contraception, they were selective in teaching only content that bordered on abstinence. They seemed to be influenced by personal beliefs on marriage and contraception (Ocran, 2021).

In Uganda, the implementation of sexuality education faced strong resistance due to the cultural belief that it promotes sexual activity and immorality among youth. Influential religious groups mobilised societal resistance to the implementation of school-based sexuality education, pressuring policymakers to remove curriculum contents that were

deemed offensive to their religious beliefs (Ninsiima et al., 2019). As a result, teachers often rely on cultural norms to guide their instruction on sex education. The primary approach to preventing pregnancy and HIV remains abstinence education (Zinyane, 2022).

A study by Mukoma et al. (2009) in South African schools found that teachers were often uncomfortable teaching about safe sex and preferred abstinence-only education within the Life Orientation curriculum. Francis (2013) observed that cultural norms were used to justify this approach, emphasizing moral values and silencing discussions about sex.

Similarly, in Malawi, the emphasis of CSE in class is on abstinence as a means of avoiding both pregnancy and STIs, including HIV (Likupe et al., 2020). The distribution of condoms to learners in schools is not promoted (Rashid & Mwale, 2016).

What can be deduced from these findings is that they illustrate how cultural morality frameworks shape teachers' beliefs and practices, demonstrating the power of societal and religious pressures in influencing curriculum delivery (Mukau & Nichols, 2024). This was one of this study's focuses: to understand how these cultural morality frameworks influence the teaching of CSE in schools.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on abstinence-only education has significant limitations. De Haas & Hutter (2019) have observed that this approach is ineffective and does not respond to the needs and realities of young people. It often presents scientifically inaccurate information, perpetuates harmful stereotypical gender roles that discriminate against female students (e.g., portraying women as responsible for men's sexual behavior), and overemphasizes religious messages (Leung et al., 2019). This undermines students' sexual citizenship, which refers to "the sexual rights granted or

denied to” them as members of a particular social group (Richardson 2000, as cited in De Haas & Hutter, 2019, p. 234).

Allen (2005) is of the view that in order to help youth make responsible choices about their sexual health, they need to be positioned positively and legitimately as sexual subjects within sexuality education programs. Otherwise, as opined by Zinyane (2022), the lack of knowledge and distorted messages about sexuality from adults are more likely to have adverse effects on the sexual health and safety of young people than the teaching of CSE.

Wood and Roller (2014) emphasise that teachers must remain unbiased and open to challenging existing social norms around sexuality and gender. They should avoid letting personal biases or experiences interfere with the program's values and objectives (Visser, 2007, as cited in Wood & Roller, 2014). After all, CSE aims not to indoctrinate but to provide essential information for learners' health and safety, recognising that parents, religious leaders, and healthcare providers may not adequately address these topics (Ngwenya, 2003).

2.3 The Impact of Teachers' Belief Systems on the Inclusion of CSE Content in Lessons

Zinyane (2022) has noted that teachers have multiple identities in societies, which may contradict their professional position as sex educators. These identities include religious and cultural beliefs, among others. For instance, Zinyane notes, teachers with particularly conservative beliefs and values may find it challenging to teach sex education objectively and comprehensively.

This phenomenon is evident in various contexts. In South Africa, for example, Francis (2013) reports that Life Orientation teachers insert their values and teach topics they find more appropriate largely because of their reserved beliefs about sex education.

In Zambia, Zulu et al. (2019) found that the CSE curriculum was treated arbitrarily, leaving teachers much room to decide how, when, and what to teach, and what to omit. With very little guidance, these choices ultimately depended on the individual teacher's judgment on what would be appropriate to teach considering, among others, the local norms about sex and sexuality education. While some teachers would withhold a few selected pieces of the CSE curriculum, Zulu et al. observed, others would only agree to teach very limited fragments according to what they deemed to be appropriate for learners.

In both India and Kenya, Njue et al. (2011), as cited by Mukonka et al. (2023), found that while teachers played a major role in giving young people information on HIV/AIDS and sexuality, they were constrained by social and cultural factors. Consequently, they often resorted to selective teaching, focusing solely on biological aspects and neglecting those related to sex and relationships.

In Malawi, this trend is further exemplified by the limited coverage of sensitive topics such as termination of pregnancy, sources of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) commodities, romantic relationships, condom use, pregnancy and prenatal care, and physical assault, often attributed to teachers' adherence to cultural and religious beliefs (Chawhanda et al., 2021).

What all these studies have shown is the significant influence of teachers' personal judgments and cultural interpretations on CSE curriculum implementation, directly

informing this study which sought to understand how teachers' beliefs shape their decisions regarding CSE content inclusion.

Zulu et al. (2019) found that the approach of selective teaching directly contradicts the core philosophy of the CSE curriculum, which aims to provide adolescents with comprehensive and unbiased information about sexuality. By restricting the scope of the curriculum, teachers ultimately limit students' understanding of sexuality and their ability to make informed decisions about their sexual health.

2.4 Teachers' Beliefs and Values and their CSE Instructional Practices

Francis (2011) says that the way teachers conceptualise learners may be translated into classroom practice and pedagogy. Teachers who view learners as knowers (Mitchell et al., 2004) or as legitimate sexual subjects (Allen, 2005) are more likely to embrace interactive strategies like role-play, group discussions, drawing, songs, illustrations, brainstorming sessions, behaviour rehearsal, and short films (Chavula et al., 2022; Pound et al., 2017; Speizer et al., 2020). On the other hand, teachers concerned with instilling a particular set of moral values in learners are more likely to use traditional didactic methods (Francis, 2011). This applies to other areas of instruction where there is a desire to instill specific values and behaviour (De Haas & Hutter, 2019).

Recognising the importance of learner engagement, Pound et al. (2017) emphasise that sexuality education programmes “should employ interactive and participatory educational strategies that actively engage recipients” (p. 6). UNESCO's (2009) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education publication confirms this, recommending that effective curricula use participatory teaching methods that actively involve learners and help them internalise and integrate information.

Research supports the effectiveness of interactive approaches to CSE (Mwiinga & Kabubi, 2020), demonstrating significant increases in knowledge, positive attitudes, and relevant skills (Wood & Roller, 2014; Speizer et al., 2020). These methods create a safe space for open and comfortable discussions of sensitive topics (Chavula et al., 2022; Francis, 2011), modify power dynamics between teachers and students, and encourage meaningful interaction (Chavula et al., 2022).

Despite the evidence supporting interactive approaches, many sexuality educators in Sub-Saharan African countries rely on lecture-style teaching that follows an authoritative and an expert teaching approach. They regard participatory and learner-centered approaches as difficult to implement (De Haas & Hutter, 2022). In South Africa, for example, Rooth (2005) established that teachers extensively used transmission teaching methods within the Life Orientation classroom. Teachers tended to focus on information giving rather than on the life skills components. Lesson observation revealed little evidence of interactive, participatory and creative methodologies such as role plays, group discussions, brainstorming, creative activities, behaviour rehearsal, participatory activities and discussions.

Similarly, Mukoma et al. (2009) found that teachers had significant limitations in using learner-centered methods, indicating a lack of understanding of the theoretical principles behind learning through practice and social modelling. In their study, teachers rated role-play “as a method unsuccessful and time-consuming” and, in some cases, discontinued using role play in the programme, opting for alternative activities (p. 44).

From what has been presented above, it is clear that these studies reveal a disconnect between recommended practices and actual implementation of CSE in various contexts.

They highlight how teachers' beliefs about learners and their values regarding morality influence their selection of teaching methods (Mukoma et al., 2009). Specifically, they are underscoring the tension between traditional, didactic approaches and interactive, participatory methods, and how this tension affects student engagement and learning. One of the questions this study sought to answer was how teachers' beliefs and values affect their CSE instructional practices.

Glover and Macleod (2016) note that top-down, teacher-centered approaches limit interaction and understanding. These methods discourage learner engagement, such as asking questions and actively participating, and may not effectively address the needs of individual learners. When such methods are used, learners often feel disengaged from CSE content (Mwiinga & Kabubi, 2020; Zinyane, 2022). Consequently, they may turn to peers and media platforms for sexual information, potentially leading to exposure to incorrect or misleading information (Glover & McLeod, 2016).

Wood and Roller (2014) have thus advised that since young people are not sexual innocents and that their knowledge needs to be recognized and brought into play in the classroom discussions, teaching approaches worldwide should be interrogated to find the most effective way in communicating sex education and engaging with students.

2.5 Challenges in the Teaching of CSE

Teachers are central to the effective delivery of Comprehensive Sexuality Education, yet they encounter numerous obstacles that hinder their capacity to provide comprehensive and sensitive instruction. These challenges encompass personal beliefs, contextual pressures, pedagogical limitations, and student-related factors. A significant challenge arises from potential conflicts between teachers' personal values and CSE content, leading to discomfort and biased teaching (UNESCO, 2018). This lack of

confidence is often compounded by inadequate training, leaving teachers unprepared for sensitive discussions (Venketsamy, 2023).

External pressures from communities, parents, or religious leaders who view CSE as taboo create a difficult environment (Haberland, 2015). Limited administrative support, including insufficient resources and professional development opportunities, further exacerbates these issues (Kapur, 2022). Pedagogical challenges include outdated materials and difficulty managing sensitive classroom dynamics (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2010). Student-related factors, such as shyness, also contribute to the complexity of CSE instruction. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive teacher training, supportive school policies, and community engagement (Venketsamy, 2023).

This overview of challenges emphasises the multifaceted nature of obstacles teachers face in delivering CSE. It highlights the critical need to examine the interplay between teachers' personal beliefs, external pressures, and pedagogical limitations, all of which significantly impact their ability to effectively teach CSE (Chavula et al., 2022). This study sought to explore these challenges, specifically focusing on how these affect CSE delivery. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing strategies to support teachers in their roles to improve CSE delivery.

2.6 Teachers' Navigation of Sexually Sensitive Questions

Studies have shown that students view teachers as trusted and respected sources of information (Lynagh et al., 2010), and are commonly approached by students with health-related and/or sensitive issues (Ollis & Meldrum, 2008, as cited in Lynagh et al., 2010). Given this trust, teachers should be able to create a safe environment for young people where they can participate uninhibitedly, without concerns about being singled

out or ridiculed (Pound et al., 2017). Accurate and age-appropriate information to students' questions about sexuality issues could help protect them from peer and media sexual pressures (Lynagh et al., 2010).

In their study, 'Elementary School Teachers' Techniques of Responding to Student Questions Regarding Sexuality Issues', Price et al. (2003) found that teachers' willingness to answer sexuality questions in front of the class varied significantly depending on the content of the question. In response to students' questions, teachers were most likely to respond in front of the class to more traditional topics, such as how a person gets HIV, when boys/girls start puberty, what happens during puberty, what are sexually transmitted diseases, and what is sexual abuse.

In contrast, other questions were perceived as more likely to be answered on an individual basis, such as: "Is it okay for someone close to the student to touch his or her private parts?" "What should students do if someone touched their private parts?" "What is a period?" and "Why are some girls' breasts larger than others?" Teachers were most likely to refer children to other school personnel when student questions implied issues of sexual abuse, an appropriate referral. Teachers reported they would most likely refer students to their guardians if students asked socially sensitive questions where acceptable responses might vary from family to family, such as dating, masturbation, and abortion (Price et al., 2003).

These findings highlight the complex role teachers play in navigating sexually sensitive questions within the school environment. Such studies underscore the need to examine the beliefs and value systems that guide their responses, particularly concerning the content they deem appropriate for classroom discussion versus individual consultation

or referral (Pound et al., 2017). How teachers navigate and address students' sexually sensitive questions was one of the questions this study sought to answer.

Lynagh et al. (2010) note that teachers are increasingly expected to both teach and manage sensitive or controversial issues within the school setting, such as sexuality. This includes not only educating students on these topics but also effectively recognising and addressing such matters when they arise in the classroom.

2.7 Teachers' Preparedness to Teach CSE

One major challenge that has been highlighted in numerous studies that concerns school-based sexuality education is the lack of competent teachers equipped with the necessary skills to deliver CSE effectively (Venketsamy, 2023). Studies across different countries have highlighted teachers' deficiencies in understanding the content and methodologies of CSE (Banda, 2020, as cited in Venketsamy, 2023).

Mkumbo (2012) has argued that since the successful implementation of school-based sexuality education curricula heavily relies on teachers' attitudes towards the subject matter, it is crucial to assess teachers' attitudes and confidence in delivering sexuality education before engaging them in such programs.

Scholars have therefore called for standardised training for CSE teachers, which would not only enhance understanding of CSE content (Mahoso & Finestone, 2023) but also equip teachers with the pedagogical tools required to handle sensitive topics in a manner that is respectful of both cultural norms and the developmental stages of their students (Venketsamy, 2023). One of the critical aspects this study sought to explore was how teachers are prepared to effectively teach CSE, focusing on the training and support systems in place, and how the availability or lack thereof of these aspects affects their ability to navigate the complexities of CSE delivery.

Masinga (2007) argues that the training of CSE educators needs to include an element of self-reflexivity where teachers acknowledge their own prejudices and identify their values and beliefs as separate from the content that they teach. This is for effective implementation of the curriculum (Glover & Macleod, 2016).

2.8 Evaluative Summary

This review of existing literature has highlighted several key themes regarding the teaching of CSE within the context of Life Skills education. While studies consistently demonstrate teachers' recognition of CSE's importance in addressing adolescent sexual health issues, they also reveal the significant influence of cultural and religious beliefs on their teaching practices. Teachers often navigate a complex terrain, balancing their professional responsibilities with personal values and societal expectations.

The literature has underscored the prevalence of abstinence-only approaches, driven by cultural norms and religious doctrines, which often conflict with the provision of comprehensive, unbiased information. Furthermore, while interactive teaching methods are advocated for effective CSE delivery, traditional didactic methods remain dominant in many Sub-Saharan African contexts. Challenges such as teacher discomfort, inadequate training, and external pressures from communities impede the successful implementation of CSE programs.

It is worth mentioning that while numerous studies seem to have explored teacher attitudes, implementation challenges, and pedagogical approaches, little attention has been given to understanding the underlying belief systems that inform teachers' decisions and actions. This study sought to provide an in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences, specifically focusing on how they reconcile their personal beliefs and values with the demands of CSE in the Life Skills curriculum in Malawi.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

The researcher explained teachers' beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of CSE in Life Skills Education through the lens of the Cultural Schema Theory as espoused by Nishida (1999). The theory says that individuals rely on schemas to understand and make sense of the world around them (Shahghasemi, 2017). Schemas are the mental frameworks that allow people to identify objects and events. They may include beliefs, emotions and values (De Hass & Hutter, 2019). Some schemas, such as personal experiences, are individual to a person; others, so-called cultural schemas, are shared by a group of people based on shared knowledge and experiences.

This research identified religious, gender norm, and societal taboo schemas as significant influences on Malawian teachers. For instance, religious schemas, rooted in dominant religious doctrines, often lead teachers to prioritize abstinence-only messages and avoid discussions about contraception, fearing they would promote 'immoral' behavior (De Hass & Hutter, 2019, p. 242).

Gender norm schemas, reflecting traditional Malawian roles, result in teachers perpetuating stereotypical gender roles that discriminate against female students. For instance, portraying women as responsible for men's sexual behaviour (Leung et al., 2019). Societal taboo schemas, stemming from the sensitive nature of sexuality, cause discomfort with using correct anatomical terms or engaging in open discussions about sexual activity (Silzer, 2016). This study used the theory to illuminate how these schemas shape teachers' CSE practices.

The study, however, also recognized the dynamic nature of these schemas. As Garro (2000) notes, individuals constantly reconstruct their past experiences and knowledge based on their present constructions of the cultural meaning system. Individuals may

experience such cultural transitions in society due to globalisation or technical improvements. In such transitions, individuals reconsider and restructure past elements from the point of view of the present (De Hass & Hutter, 2019). For instance, teachers exposed to CSE training or engaging in reflective practice may begin to challenge and modify their existing schemas (De Hass & Hutter, 2019).

The study aimed to understand how Malawi's cultural transitions, resulting from globalisation and increased access to information (Ferguson et al., 2017), are impacting Life Skills teachers' existing schemas related to sexuality education.

2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed literature on the teaching of CSE, revealing that while teachers acknowledge CSE's importance, cultural and religious norms often cause discomfort and selective teaching. Abstinence-only approaches, despite their limitations, and personal beliefs heavily influence content delivery. Although interactive methods are preferred, traditional teaching persists. Teachers encounter challenges like value conflicts and inadequate training, and handle sensitive questions with varying openness. The chapter has also presented Nishida's (1999) Cultural Schema Theory, which helped to understand how the broader cultural context—religious beliefs, gender norms, and societal attitudes towards sexuality—shapes teachers' beliefs, values and practices regarding the teaching of CSE. The following chapter details the study's methodology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter Overview

This section presents the research methodology employed in exploring secondary school teacher' beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Life Skills Education. It highlights the research paradigm that guided the study, methods and procedures used in selecting the respondents, developing research instruments, and generating, managing and analysing data.

3.1 Research Paradigm

In educational research, the term paradigm is used to describe a researcher's worldview (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It is the researcher's way of understanding and studying the world's reality (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This understanding guides a research study' focus and approach (Cohen et al., 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This study was guided by interpretive paradigm so that rich, in-depth data is generated to answer the research questions pertaining to teachers' beliefs, values systems and practices regarding the teaching of CSE in Life Skills education in secondary schools.

According to Varpio et al. (2020), interpretive paradigm rests on the assumption that "reality is socially and experientially constructed" and to understand these realities, researchers need to explore the meanings constructed by individuals and groups (p. 992). The aim is to appreciate individuals' subjective experiences and how these

individuals assert meaning to their experiences (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). By collecting data from a multitude of perspectives, the researcher gains a richer and more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon (Varpio et al., 2020). This approach allows the participants and their contexts to become part of the research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

3.2 Research Design

Mouton (2001) defines a research design as a plan of how one intends to conduct their research. This plan is there to help generate empirical evidence that can be used to answer the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). It guides the researcher in how they can collect, analyse and interpret observed facts (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). According to Cohen et al. (2018), the choice of a research design is determined by the purpose of one's study. This study sought to explore the phenomenon of secondary school teachers' lived experiences as they grapple with their personal beliefs and value systems when teaching CSE in the Life Skills curriculum. For this reason, this researcher settled for a qualitative phenomenological research design.

According to Mertens (2010), qualitative phenomenological research emphasises the individuals' subjective experiences. The focus is on understanding participants' perspectives and views of physical or social realities (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015), not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher puts aside all prejudgments and collects data on how individuals make sense out of a particular experience or situation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This research design is aligned with the chosen interpretive paradigm as it focuses on the participants' subjective experiences (Patton, 2015) of teaching of CSE in Life Skills Education.

3.3 Study Site

The study was conducted in eight secondary schools in Dowa District, one of the Malawi's twenty-eight districts located in Central Region. All secondary schools in Dowa District are under the jurisdiction of Central East Education Division (CEED). Dowa secondary schools were selected due to the researcher's residence in the district. This proximity was envisioned to significantly reduce travel costs associated with data collection, allowing for efficient use of resources and study completion, considering that the research was self-funded.

Beyond this practical consideration, Dowa District, like many rural districts in Malawi, has a high prevalence of teen pregnancies, and high rates of HIV infections (Phiri, 2017). A combination of these factors made this researcher find Dowa District an ideal site for the study.

3.4 Study Period

The study was conducted within one month.

3.5 Study Population

Thomas (2021) defines a population as a group of individuals having one or more characteristics in common. It is a total set from which individuals or units of the study are chosen (De Vos, Strydom & Delport, 2005). The population for this study was all secondary school Life Skills teachers from Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs), Conventional Secondary Schools and Private Secondary Schools. According to Malawi's Education Management Information System [EMIS] (2024), there are seventy-one secondary schools in Dowa, all categories included. Dowa District is predominantly Chewa speaking and has a significant Christian population (Ndaui,

2015). As it was not possible to study the entire population of Life Skills teachers from the district, a sample was drawn.

3.6 Sampling Methods

This study used purposive sampling to gain the best insights into teachers' experiences of the teaching of CSE within Life Skills Education. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling which identifies participants based on pre-determined criteria needed for the specific study (Patton, 2015; Thomas, 2021). The selection criterion was that the participants are those teachers who teach Life Skills in secondary school. Teachers fitting this criterion were invited to participate in the study. This researcher believed that Life Skills teachers were better placed to talk about their experiences of teaching of CSE within the context of Life Skills education. Although the limitation with purposive or judgment sampling technique is the lack of ability to generalize from the samples, as with other non-probability methods, its strength lies in the fact that it can ensure that the collection of information is directly relevant to the subjects being investigated (Thomas, 2021).

3.7 Sample Size

This researcher sought views from fourteen Life Skills teachers from the eight secondary schools that were conveniently selected. In the qualitative style of research, it is more likely that the sample size will be small (Cohen et al., 2018). This is so because the goal of qualitative research is not to generalise the findings of the study (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020), but to "try to understand the interpretations of individuals about the social phenomena they interact with" (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p. 55).

3.8 Data Collection Instruments

Adosi (2020) has cited that it is expedient to collect data using the right instruments. According to Creswell (2019), research instruments are the tools used by the researcher to collect data. The researcher collected data through an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured individual interviews in this study.

3.8.1 An Open-ended Questionnaire

An open-ended questionnaire (**see appendix 1**) was chosen because it has the ability to collect required data within a short period of time (Dawson, 2009). Open-ended questions attract open-ended responses that might contain the ‘gems’ of information needed. They catch the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candour which are the hallmarks of qualitative data (Cohen et al., 2005).

3.8.2 Semi-structured Individual Interviews

Due to the sensitivity of sexuality topics and to facilitate deeper probing into teachers' beliefs, values and practices on the teaching of CSE, semi-structured individual interviews were also used to generate data. The same questionnaire used in the initial data collection was used as an interview guide. The participants were the same; they had answered the questionnaire to allow for a deeper interrogation of particular themes that emerged from the questionnaires. According to Dawson (2009), using interviews on top questionnaires helps to provide richer data than would have been the case if only questionnaires were used.

3.9 Data Management Methods

All data collected during this study, including questionnaires and recordings from individual interviews, were stored securely to ensure confidentiality and prevent unauthorised access. Questionnaires were stored in a safe place with restricted access.

The audio-recorded data from individual interviews were saved on a password-protected server, and limited access was granted only to the researcher.

3.10 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis “involves organising, accounting for, and explaining the data; in short, making sense of the data in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (Cohen et al., 2005, p. 147). The aim is to understand the various constitutive elements of one’s data through an inspection of the relationships between concepts (Mouton, 2001).

In this study, data derived from individual interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and compared with the data obtained from questionnaires. Thematic analysis was used because in qualitative research, the approach to analysing data generated is generally inductive (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This method follows a step-by-step approach. The researcher first transcribes the data before its actual analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this study, the researcher transcribed interview recordings verbatim to maintain the views of the participants and not to misrepresent them. Through this method, the researcher was able to draw patterns and make connections between each response.

The first step of the data analysis was for the researcher to familiarise and immerse himself in the data. This was done by inserting notes and comments on the transcript to ensure that data was not misrepresented. The second step was to generate codes for the data. This consisted of pulling the similar ideas together and giving them a label. The final step involved searching for themes by grouping codes together, as recommended by Nowell et al. (2017). This was guided by the research questions guiding this study.

The research questions determine the main themes of the data, as they guide the researcher to identify responses that seek to answer the main research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were identified that seemed to provide a clear link between the research questions and study findings, thus illustrating the answers to the main research question, namely, ‘What are the secondary school teachers’ beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Life Skills Education?’

Some of the themes that emerged in this study included teachers’ perceptions of teaching CSE in schools; teachers’ beliefs and value systems and their CSE instructional practices; and challenges teachers face in CSE instruction. All of these themes have been presented in the Findings and Discussion chapter which follows this chapter. Relevant quotes have been provided in the text to illustrate these themes.

3.11 Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credibility in qualitative research is concerned with how congruent are the findings with reality (Stahl & King, 2020; Ahmed, 2024). It is analogous with questions about internal validity in quantitative research (Stahl & King, 2020). On other hand, what trustworthiness means is that when readers go through the written work, they should have a sense of confidence in what the researcher has reported. One method of achieving all this is through triangulation which, roughly stated, means using more than one method of data collection (Patton, 2015) to repeatedly establish identifiable patterns (Stahl & King, 2020).

In this study, an open-ended semi-structured questionnaire was administered to generate qualitative data about the participants’ subjective experiences of the teaching of CSE. This was followed by semi-structured individual interviews to verify and delve deeper

into the themes that emerged from the first dataset. Furthermore, to ensure the credibility and dependability of this study, the questionnaire was developed before data collection, and each participant was asked the same questions (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Patton, 2015).

The researcher was consciously aware, open and honest to guard against any preconceived biases in the findings. To achieve this, questionnaire and interview data were compared for consistency, and all sources were acknowledged. When reaching a conclusion and making recommendations, arguments have been presented with supported findings and evidence to back them (Patton, 2015).

Thick descriptions of detailed contextual information to enable readers to assess the transferability of findings (Ahmed, 2024) have been provided. According to Ahmed, transferability pertains to the degree to which the research findings can be extrapolated to alternative contexts or situations, an idea similar to the concept of replicability in quantitative research which qualitative research does not seek (Stahl & King, 2020).

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Dawson (2009) has argued that researchers are unable to conduct their projects successfully if they do not receive the help of other people. A researcher is indebted to these persons and should devise ways to reciprocate, within the constraints of research and personal ethics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). According to Dawson (2009), one way of achieving this is by making sure that the participants and the information they provide are treated with honesty and respect.

The researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the informants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Such ethical agreements as voluntary and informed participation (informed consent), protection from harm, anonymity and

confidentiality need to be taken into consideration (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Resnik, 2020; Thomas, 2021) more especially when dealing with controversial and sensitive topics where “profound ethical dilemmas arise” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p. 362).

In this study, the researcher asked all participants to sign a consent form (**see appendix 2**) and assured them that the information provided during the process of data collection interviews and completion of questionnaires was not to be disclosed to anyone except for the purpose of the study, and that the information would be strictly confidential.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC) under UNIMAREC Protocol Number P.05/24/338, granting permission to proceed with the research project. Permission was also asked from the school administrators of the schools involved (**see appendix 4**) to allow their Life Skills education teachers to be involved in the study.

The researcher introduced himself; informed the participants about the procedures to be followed to make them fully understand what the research project entailed; and that the participation was voluntary and that none would be victimized. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, the researcher encouraged them not to write their names or school name on the research instruments. Instead, unique codes (Teacher A to Teacher N) were assigned to each participant for identification purposes. Pseudonyms of school names involved were also used for confidentiality purposes.

3.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the research methodology that was used to explore teachers' beliefs, values and practices regarding Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) within Life Skills Education in Malawi. Guided by an interpretive paradigm and

employing a qualitative phenomenological design, the study utilised purposive sampling to select fourteen Life Skills teachers from eight secondary schools in Dowa District. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, then analysed thematically. The study emphasised credibility through triangulation and thick descriptions, and ensured ethical considerations by obtaining informed consent, guaranteeing anonymity, and securing necessary permissions. The next chapter presents findings and discussion of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter discusses the study findings obtained through an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured individual interviews. The study sought to explore secondary school teachers' beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Life Skills Education. The teachers' beliefs, value systems and practices were discussed through the lens of the Cultural Schema Theory as espoused by Nishida (1999).

4.1 Participants' Demographics

This study involved fourteen Life Skills teachers with varied academic qualifications and years of teaching experience. Tables 1-3 show characteristics of teachers involved in this study. Pseudonyms of participants and school names have been used for confidentiality purposes.

Table 1: Demographics of Participants from the Selected Community Day Secondary Schools

<i>Demographics of Participants from CDSSs</i>					
<i>Participant Code</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Academic Qualification</i>	<i>Area of Specialisation</i>	<i>Teaching experience</i>	<i>School</i>
<i>Teacher A</i>	Male	DipEd	Geography & Social Studies	29	Koka
<i>Teacher B</i>	Female	DipEd	English and Chichewa	20	Koka
<i>Teacher C</i>	Male	BAEd	Geography & Bible Knowledge	20	Kango
<i>Teacher D</i>	Male	BAEd	English & Geography	12	Kango
<i>Teacher E</i>	Male	DipEd	Geography & Social Studies	7	Ndevu
<i>Teacher F</i>	Male	BAEd	Geography & English	3	Ndevu

As shown in the table above, the study involved three Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs), with two Life Skills teachers from each school participating. Three of these teachers held a Diploma in Education, while the other three held a Bachelor of Education degree, indicating that all participants were qualified to teach in secondary schools. Their areas of specialisation included Geography, Social Studies, Bible Knowledge, English, and Chichewa. Their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 29 years.

Table 2: Demographics of Participants from the Selected Pvt Secondary Schools

<i>Demographics of Participants from Pvt. Schools</i>					
<i>Participant Code</i>	Sex	Academic Qualification	Area of Specialisation	Years of experience	School
<i>Teacher G</i>	Male	BAEd	Geography & Social Studies	7	Maru
<i>Teacher H</i>	Male	DipEd	Geography & Social Studies	19	Maru
<i>Teacher I</i>	Male	BAEd	English & History	3	Risema
<i>Teacher J</i>	Male	BAEd	Geography & Bible Knowledge	15	Risema
<i>Teacher K</i>	Female	BAEd	Geography & History	5	Pemba

As indicated in the table above, three private secondary schools participated in the study. At Pemba Private Secondary School, only one participant was involved, as she was the sole Life Skills teacher at the time of the study. One participant held a Diploma in Education, while the other four held a Bachelor of Education degree, indicating that all participants were qualified to teach in secondary schools. Their areas of specialisation included Geography, Social Studies, History, and Bible Knowledge. Their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 19 years.

Table 3: Demographics of Participants from the Selected Conventional Secondary Schools

Demographics of Participants from conventional Secondary Schools

<i>Participant Code</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Academic Qualification</i>	<i>Area of Specialisation</i>	<i>Years of experience</i>	<i>School</i>
<i>Teacher L</i>	Male	BAEd	Geography & Social Studies	17	Dose
<i>Teacher M</i>	Female	BAEd	Geography & Social Studies	8	Dose
<i>Teacher N</i>	Male	BAEd	English & History	25	Chava

As indicated in the table above, two conventional secondary schools participated in this study. While the initial intention was to involve three such schools, permission was not granted by one, despite repeated attempts. Two Life Skills teachers from Dose Secondary School participated, while only one participated from Chava Secondary School, as he was the sole Life Skills teacher at the time of the study. All participants were qualified secondary school teachers, holding Bachelor of Education degrees. Their areas of specialisation included Geography, Social Studies, English, and History. Their teaching experience ranged from 8 to 25 years.

Based on the participants' demographics, it can be concluded that all participants were qualified secondary school teachers with varied areas of specialisation. An appreciation of the participants' demographics is critical in understanding their responses on their experiences of teaching CSE in secondary schools.

4.2. Teachers' Perceptions of CSE in Schools

This study revealed diverse perspectives among teachers on the importance of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in schools. The table below presents these varying viewpoints on the significance of CSE.

Table 4: Teachers' Views on the Importance of CSE in Schools

Importance of CSE in schools	TA	TB	TC	TD	TE	TF	TG	TH	TI	TJ	TK	TL	TM	TN
Fosters decision making skills	√	√	√	√	√	√	×	√	×	√	×	×	√	×
Promotes self-awareness	×	×	×	√	√	×	√	×	√	×	×	×	√	×
Clears misleading information from the social media	×	×	×	×	√	×	×	×	×	×	×	√	√	×
Leads to behavioural change	×	√	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	√	√	×	×

Key

√ = significance cited by the teacher

×

TA-TF are teachers from Community Day Secondary Schools

TG-TJ & TN are teachers from Private Schools

TK-TM are teachers from Conventional Secondary Schools

4.2.1 CSE Fosters Decision Making Skills

Table 2 shows that nine out of fourteen teachers in the study indicated that CSE equips students with accurate information about sexuality and encompasses a broader range of life skills that help them navigate everyday challenges and make informed decisions. While a majority of teachers who held this view were from CDSSs, it is noteworthy that this sentiment was expressed by teachers from all school types participating in the study.

Teacher A, for example, explained:

CSE is important because it helps students to know more about sexuality. Such concepts as sexual health and reproduction help them to know how they can protect themselves from STIs, pregnancies and many others (Teacher A, Koka CDSS).

Teacher C shared the same sentiments:

CSE helps students to make informed decisions on sexual matters. They know biological processes taking place in their bodies, how to resist some of the feelings in their bodies and are able to prevent such things as HIV and AIDs, pregnancy and STIs (Teacher C, Kango CDSS).

Teacher E had this to say:

CSE helps students to look at the impact that may come when they are doing sex, so they may shun sex, or they may opt to use the contraceptives or condoms so that they should prevent the pregnancy or impregnating someone. So, doing that means you are making a good decision (Teacher E, Ndevu CDSS).

Teacher H, from a private secondary school, added:

I think it is important, simply because these days we are facing numerous challenges as far as reproductive health is concerned. For example, we have such issues as fistula. So, this will help them find better ways of preventing them (Teacher H, Maru Pvt.).

Teacher M was from a conventional secondary school and he explained:

For me, I feel it is important. Because when we look at how the world is going this time around, and how life is mainly among the youth, I feel like it is important that they have to know how they can prevent reproduction health challenges like STIs, teenage pregnancies, abortions and many more (Teacher M, Chava Secondary School).

From the above excerpts, it is clear that there was a shared understanding among the teachers about the critical role of CSE in equipping students with the knowledge and skills for navigating social and health challenges effectively. This finding aligns with research conducted in Zimbabwe by Mukau and Nichols (2024) where teachers emphasised the importance of CSE in addressing issues like early pregnancies, STIs, and sexual abuse. The consistency of these findings across different contexts (Malawi and Zimbabwe) underscores the universal relevance of CSE in addressing these critical issues in sub-Saharan Africa, where young people are disproportionately affected by sexual health challenges (Jimmy et al., 2013).

De Hass and Hutter (2019) and Krebbekx (2019) have also pointed out that teaching CSE in schools helps equip students with the necessary information for healthy and informed choices about their sexual lives. In Malawi, the Ministry of Education integrated CSE into the Life Skills curriculum to empower young people to cope with

such challenges mentioned by participants in this study (Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014; UNESCO, 2021; Rashid & Mwale, 2016).

4.2.2 CSE Promotes Self-awareness

Another issue some teachers pointed out is that of self-awareness. This was raised by two teachers from CDSSs, two teachers from private schools, and one teacher from a conventional secondary school. Teacher G, for example, explained:

CSE enhances self-awareness in the students. Since students go through several physical changes as they grow up, they need to know these things so that they do not get surprised what is happening to them (Teacher G, Maru Pvt.).

Teacher D shared similar view:

It is important because it helps students to be aware themselves which I think is the first step to achieving one's goals (Teacher D, Kango CDSS).

Teacher M had this to say:

I feel like it is important that they have to know much about the development of their bodies and whatever is happening in them too. That is to say to know how their bodies work and how to take care of their body parts (Teacher M, Chava Secondary School).

It is important to mention that the teachers' observations in this study align with the findings of some studies that have indicated that CSE can positively impact self-awareness in young people. For example, a study by the Guttmacher Institute (2010) found that adolescents who received CSE were more likely to have positive attitudes towards their bodies and sexuality.

Similarly, a study by WHO (2010) has also shown that CSE can help young people develop essential life skills, such as critical thinking and decision-making, crucial for self-awareness and personal growth. This finding underscores the broader impact of CSE beyond just sexual health education, demonstrating its role in cultivating crucial cognitive skills in young people that are essential for navigating complex social situations.

4.2.3 CSE Clears Misleading Information from Social Media

Some teachers in this study felt that they were the right people to deliver CSE to students because of the influx of misleading information about sexuality on social media. One teacher from a Community Day Secondary School (CDSS) and two teachers from conventional secondary schools expressed this view.

Teacher L, for example, observed:

You see, nowadays, students are much exposed to the media. We know that in the media, there is some information which is not reliable. So, when they are hearing some other things from us, whom they trust, I feel like they can change very easily the information which is out there (Teacher L, Dose Secondary).

Teacher E was of the same view and added that if students are not taught in school, they learn from somewhere else. He explained:

Because I look at it as if we don't teach them, then they will learn it from somewhere. We, teachers, have proper ways of handling the issues and how we can make them control themselves (Teacher E, Ndevu CDSS).

Let it be mentioned that while this was not specifically highlighted by any of the teachers from private secondary schools in this study, Mahoso and Finestone's (2023) study also found that teachers perceived the merits of teaching CSE as one way of

clearing up sexual misconceptions from the media among children. This study finding is significant as it emphasises CSE's role as a vital filter, providing students with accurate, evidence-based sexual health knowledge to critically evaluate the inaccurate information they encounter.

Furthermore, consistent with teachers' observations in this study, Olufadewa et al. (2021) and Eisenberg et al. (2011) also found that teachers are best positioned to deliver comprehensive, reliable, and non-judgmental sexuality education. As observed in Hashimoto et al.'s (2012) study, recognising teachers as key agents in sexuality education underscores their crucial role in fostering healthy sexual development of the young people.

4.2.4 Leads to Behavioural Change

Some teachers in this study suggested that CSE may also lead to behavioural change among students. Interestingly, this was not highlighted by any of the teachers from private schools but was only mentioned by one teacher from a Community Day Secondary School (CDSS) and two teachers from a conventional secondary school. Here are the teachers' excerpts:

Teacher B:

One thing is that with sexuality knowledge, our students know what they are supposed to do and what they are not supposed to do. They may be able to know that what they used to do was bad and may change their behaviour and start doing the right things. So, I think knowledge of CSE is important to them (Teacher B, Koka CDSS).

Teacher L had this to say:

I feel like it [CSE] is very important. In fact, it is also changing the behaviour of our students because we teach them what is right and wrong (Teacher L, Dose Secondary).

Teacher K:

Yes, it is very important because it brings change to students as far as sexuality is concerned. They know how to react to any behaviour related to sexuality. So, it is very important to incorporate that concept within life skills syllabus. Behaviour change, it leads to behavioural change because we teach assertiveness (Teacher K, Dose Secondary).

It is important to mention that although Teacher B, Teacher L and Teacher K suggested that CSE leads to students' behavioural change, as also found by Ocran (2021) and Mahoso and Funstone (2023), other studies have yielded conflicting results. For instance, Rashid and Mwale (2016) assessed the effects of sex education on the risky sexual behaviours of adolescents at Mbenjere Secondary, Ntaja and Nsanama Community Day Secondary Schools in the Machinga district in Malawi.

In their study, they found that much of the sexual knowledge acquired in class was perceived as academic rather than practical, leading to a disconnect between knowledge and behaviour. They concluded, therefore, that simply providing CSE information to the young may not be sufficient to induce behavioural change.

Instead, Rashid and Mwale have suggested in their study the importance of considering the context, delivery methods, and the students' perceptions when designing and implementing CSE programs, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that goes beyond mere information dissemination.

Nevertheless, it is evident from the presented excerpts that teachers in this study believed that the teaching of CSE is crucial in schools. This implies that they did not support the common misperception among people that CSE encourages young people to experiment with sex (UNESCO, 2015, 2018).

In his 1999 Cultural Schema Theory, Nishida has argued that individuals rely on schemas to understand and make sense of the world around them (Shahghasemi, 2017). In the context of this study, these schemas include teachers' beliefs, emotions and values they have towards CSE (De Hass & Hutter, 2019).

Traditionally, discussions surrounding sex and sexuality have been taboo in Malawi (Malata et al., 2023). However, the findings of this study appear to suggest a potential shift in these cultural schemas among the teachers involved in the study. While traditional schemas may have discouraged open discussions about sexuality, the increasing prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among young people, such as high rates of STIs and teenage pregnancies (Rashid & Mwale, 2016) may have led to a re-evaluation of these existing schemas.

This observation is in line with other scholars who have opined that one's cultural schemas are not fixed but dynamic due to new information and experiences (Garro, 2000). This study suggests that the social and health challenges affecting the young people in the country (Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014; Rashid & Mwale, 2016; UNESCO, 2021) might have led to the recognition of the importance of CSE as a vital component of a holistic education.

4.3 The Influence of Cultural Morality Frameworks on the Teaching of CSE

In this study, three distinct categories of teachers were identified based on how cultural and religious beliefs and values influenced their delivery of CSE. One teacher, adhering

to cultural and religious norms, avoided teaching certain CSE concepts. Another teacher, while covering all aspects of CSE as stipulated in the Life Skills curriculum, inserted his personal values into the instruction. In contrast, twelve teachers seemed to disregard their beliefs and values and presented the CSE content as put in the Life Skills curriculum. Table 2 below shows how teachers' beliefs and values influenced the teaching of CSE.

Table 5: How Cultural Morality Frameworks Influenced the Teaching of CSE

Teacher's Beliefs and Values and the Teaching of CSE	TA	TB	T C	T D	TE	TF	T G	T H	TI	TJ	T K	TL	TM	T N
Avoided teaching some CSE concepts	×	×	×	×	×	×	√	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Inserted personal values into CSE instruction	×	×	×	×	×	√	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Taught CSE as stipulated in the Life Skills curriculum	√	√	√	√	√	×	×	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

Key

√ = response cited by the teacher

× = response not cited by the teacher

As shown in table above, a majority of teachers, twelve in total, taught CSE as stipulated in the Life Skills curriculum. However, two teachers, Teacher G and Teacher

F deviated from the curriculum. Teacher G avoided teaching some aspects of CSE, while Teacher F inserted his values into CSE instruction. Both of them seemed to be influenced by their cultural and religious beliefs and values.

4.3.1 Those Deviating from the Curriculum

In this study, Teacher G explained that cultural norms discourage open discussions about private body parts. He expressed concern that openly discussing these topics could lead to him being labelled as immoral. He explained:

To certain extent, yes, as our communities are morally influenced by cultural and religious beliefs. Mentioning parts of one's body (private parts) is a taboo in our society. I shun away from the real stuff to avoid being labelled a bad teacher (Teacher G, Maru Pvt.).

This study finding aligns with previous research which has indicated that societal taboos contribute to discomfort with using accurate anatomical terms or engaging in open discussions about sexual activity (Silzer, 2016). This confirms that teachers encounter challenges when delivering certain aspects of sex education due to these pervasive societal taboos surrounding open discussions about sexual matters (Adekola & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2021; Glover & Macleod, 2016; Mukau & Nichols, 2024). This moral panic is detrimental to effective implementation of sexuality education (UNESCO, 2019).

On the other hand, Teacher F, while claiming to cover all aspects of CSE, incorporated personal religious beliefs and values into CSE instruction. He reported that he tells students at the end of such lessons that concepts such as Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) and condom use are contrary to God's will. He stated:

Yes, some doctrines in the church teach us not to be involved in issues of LGBT and condom use but Life Skills has those concepts. There are several verses in The Bible which discourage such practices. I teach them, yes, but I also tell them that those things are contrary to God's will. There are no specific verses which talk about condom use but you just have a general feeling that such things are unbiblical (Teacher F, Ndevu CDSS).

What teacher F is explaining has been pointed out in literature that religious teachings can foster distrust towards key components of school-based sexuality education, such as contraception and gender diversity, which are often perceived as conflicting with established beliefs and doctrines (Olowu, 2015). This shows the significant influence religious beliefs have on teachers' effective delivery of CSE.

The study finding also shows that teachers prioritise their perceived role in shaping morally upright citizens and supporting students in completing their education for a better future as observed by Adekola and Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2021). For these educators, student character and morality are paramount (Leung et al., 2019). This perspective, while understandable within its religious context, can lead to selective or incomplete delivery of CSE content (Ocran, 2021), potentially hindering students' access to crucial information for their sexual health and well-being (De Hass & Hutter, 2019).

Let it be pointed out that Nishida's (1999) Cultural Schema Theory aims to understand how individual reasoning is motivated by such religious schemas as possessed by Teacher G and Teacher F. Schemas help individuals to quickly and efficiently process information that is consistent with their cultural background (Shahghasemi, 2017).

In the context of this study, it is obvious that Teacher G and Teacher F struggle to reconcile the CSE curriculum with their personal beliefs and values. Teacher F, for example, particularly finds himself at odds with topics such as LGBT rights and condom use. This tension highlights the conflict between the teacher's cultural schemas which forbid open discussions on topics to do with sexuality and the demands of the curriculum (Chavula et al., 2022).

Wood and Roller (2014) have maintained, however, that CSE is not aimed at indoctrinating or conveying disrespect for any parental religious and philosophical convictions. Rather, it is aimed at equipping young people with required sexuality information for healthy sexual decisions (De Hass & Hutter, 2019; Chawhanda et al., 2021). Therefore, let it be suggested in this study that finding ways of helping such teachers to be able to put aside any bias or personal experience which may cloud their adherence to programmatic values and intentions is essential.

As for Mukau and Nichols (2024), findings such as these underscore the critical need for standardised training and comprehensive support mechanisms for teachers to effectively deliver CSE and address complex challenges surrounding sexual education. The importance of standardised training to enhance teachers' capacity to deliver effective CSE has also been highlighted by Okon and Uoro (2019).

Zinyane (2022) points out that such a training should not focus solely on content but also on various approaches to discussing culturally and religiously sensitive material, while acknowledging that teachers' diverse cultural backgrounds influence their perceptions of CSE.

4.3.2 Those who Delivered CSE as Stipulated in the Curriculum

As indicated earlier, twelve teachers, while acknowledging their cultural and religious demands, cited that they delivered CSE content as stipulated in the Life Skills curriculum. Teacher C, for example, highlighted the role of CSE in schools within a context where open discussions about sexuality might be limited within family settings. He indicated:

No cultural or religious aspect prevent me from teaching elements of CSE. I look at the importance of teaching CSE concepts. I know that parents do not talk sexual matters with their children so I teach them because I know it's the only opportunity (Teacher C, Kango CDSS).

As noted by Teacher C in the excerpt above, Wanje et al. (2017) in Kenya and Hashimoto et al. (2012) in Japan reported in their studies that cultural and religious norms negatively affected communication on sexual health and relationships between parents and their children. In Malawi, many parents delay discussions on sexuality education out of fear of encouraging premature sexual exploration (Nash et al., 2019). When adolescents begin to express sexual and romantic interests, parents react with anxiety and fail to communicate openly with their child about sex and sexuality (Kangaude, 2021).

As for Teacher M, he at first had reservations when it came to the teaching of CSE content but reported having no problems now. He stated:

This time around, I don't have any problem. Previously, I had some reservations. But later on, I discovered that there wasn't any need for me to have those reservations. As long as something has been given by the syllabus, we need to teach everything freely without any restrictions (Teacher M, Chava Secondary School).

On the other hand, some participants in this study seemed to acknowledge their own prejudices when it comes to the teaching of CSE and reported that they put such prejudices aside: Teacher I, for example, explained:

I have learnt as a teacher to put aside my beliefs and focus on the knowledge my students must have. So, I just teach as it is because I know that students need to learn (Teacher I, Risema Pvt.).

These findings suggest that some teachers understood that open discussions about sexuality may be taboo or discouraged within certain family settings due to cultural or religious beliefs. Consequently, they recognised the school's crucial role as a key source of sexual health information for young people.

Through the lens of Nishida's (1999) Cultural Schema Theory, it can be argued that these teachers' responses suggest an awareness of cultural schemas that may prohibit open discussion of sexuality topics. This awareness reflects a schema that recognizes the school as a vital institution for providing essential knowledge and skills to young people.

Francis (2015) stresses that effective sexuality education teachers need to understand their own prejudices. They need to realize that rather than passively reacting to topics, their role involves actively promoting healthy attitudes and fostering a safe learning environment that promotes student comfort and open dialogue about sexuality matters (Glover & Macleod, 2016).

4.4 Teachers' Beliefs and Values and their CSE Instructional Practices

Participants in this study provided varied responses regarding their instructional methods for CSE. Some teachers indicated using learner-centred approaches, while

others preferred more traditional methods like lecturing. The table below shows the instructional methods mentioned by participants in this study:

Table 6: Teachers' Preferred CSE Instructional Methods

Preferred Instructional Method	TA	TB	TC	TD	TE	TF	TG	TH	TI	TJ	TK	TL	TM	TN
Traditional didactic methods	×	×	×	×	×	√	√	×	×	×	√	√	×	×
Learner-centered methods	√	√	√	√	√	×	×	√	√	√	×	×	√	√

Key

√ = instructional method preferred by the teacher

× = instructional method not preferred by the teacher

4.4.1 Those Preferring Traditional Didactic Methods

In this study, four out of fourteen teachers stated that they preferred lecturing methods for delivering CSE due to the sensitivity of the topics. Two of these teachers were from a conventional secondary school, one from a CDSSs, and one from a private school. Since these responses came from all school types in the study, it indicates that this preference was not exclusive to any particular school setting.

Teacher L, for example, while acknowledging the value of group work, stated that she often uses lecturing method because of the sensitivity of the topics. She explained:

Whenever I'm delivering that [CSE], of course I use group method. But mostly it's about lecturing. Why do I use lecturing? Because those things are more sensitive. Adolescents have got so much information which is not true. So, they need to get true information from us. Meaning that I have to be the one teaching them, telling them what it is all about. Of course I do welcome their ideas. But you see that most of the times, their ideas are bad. They are just misconceptions.

I like lecturing to them so that they can understand things they should know
(Teacher L, Dose Secondary School).

Similarly, teacher K indicated that although he utilises question and answer techniques, he limits students' involvement because to him, many students become curious when some of the topics are discussed. He cited that just explaining the concepts to students becomes ideal. He stated:

When we give more chance to students, they divert. They ask so many questions. They are more curious. So, I usually present facts and then just ask them what they have understood on that component (Teacher K, Dose Secondary School).

Teacher F and Teacher G added another interesting perspective. They explained that apart from the sensitivity of sexuality topics, lecture method helps them to finish the syllabus in time as extensive student involvement would hinder their ability to cover the syllabus within the allotted time. Teacher G, for example, explained:

You know what, students tend to become highly curious and they tend to engage in lengthy discussions when the topics of sex and sexuality are introduced, which can make someone not finish the syllabus in time. So, I think lecturing to me solves that problem (Teacher G, Maru Pvt.).

As found in this study, Rooth's (2005) study with South African Life Orientation teachers highlighted the prevalence of transmission teaching methods and limited use of interactive strategies when delivering CSE content. Glover and Macleod (2016) have argued, however, that teacher-centred methods discourage students' participation and lead to a disconnect with the content under instruction. As a result, students turn to less reliable sources like peers and media platforms to learn more about sex, ending up having incorrect and misguided material on the topic of sex.

Nishida' (1999) Cultural Schema Theory helps to understand why these teachers prefer traditional, teacher-centered methods for delivering CSE. Teachers may perceive CSE topics as sensitive and potentially embarrassing, leading them to adopt a more controlled approach. This aligns with cultural norms that often stigmatise discussions about sexuality (De Hass & Hutter, 2019)

However, it is evident from Teacher G and Teacher K's responses that students enjoy discussing CSE topics, indicating a strong desire to learn more. Therefore, as recommended by Zinyane (2022), it is important that CSE teachers be preparing interactive lessons which foster a safe and supportive environment. In such learning environments, students feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics (Francis, 2011; Chavula et al., 2022).

4.4.2 Those Preferring Learner-Centered Approaches

As mentioned earlier, other teachers in this study, ten in total, recognized the effectiveness of learner-centered approaches in the delivery of CSE. Teacher D, for example, recognised the value of class discussions, group work and case studies in promoting student participation and understanding. He explained:

I often use class discussions, group work and case studies. These methods are preferred because they are participatory and help students to understand concepts easily. These methods also help them to share information they know about sexuality because I understand that because of social media, students come to class with some information already. I don't think lecturing method can be the best method, as if students know nothing at all (Teacher D, Kango CDSS).

Teacher A and B highlighted the advantages of group work in fostering student engagement and confidence. Teacher A, for example, noted:

I use group work because students are free to give answers in groups. They share real experiences (Teacher A, Koka CDSS).

Teacher B added:

I often use group work because I feel like it's where students share views and contribute with confidence (Teacher B, Koka CDSS).

Teacher J emphasised the inclusive nature of group work, stating:

Group work allows shy students to be open when they are among their peers (Teacher J, Risema Pvt.).

Teacher N highlighted the significance of involving all students in discussions about sexuality as it is about their own bodies. He stated:

I usually use class discussion method in order to involve all learners since the content concern their bodies (Teacher N, Pemba Pvt.).

It has to be stated that Nishida's Cultural Schema Theory emphasises that cultural schemas influence how individuals learn and acquire knowledge (Silzer, 2016). By incorporating learner-centered approaches, these teachers, unlike those who preferred traditional didactive methods, demonstrated an awareness of this principle. They effectively addressed the cultural and social factors that shape student learning experiences.

This is in tandem with Nishida's theory which underscores the importance of considering cultural contexts and individual differences when designing effective learning experiences (De Hass & Hutter, 2019; Silzer, 2016).

Mwiinga and Kabubi (2020) have recommended that Life Skills teachers should be encouraged to adopt learner-centered methods so that school-based sexuality education

programmes are effectively implemented. After all, Pound et al. (2017) have observed, young people often appreciate interactive teaching techniques that engage them.

4.5 Challenges Teachers Face in CSE Instruction

From the findings of this study, there is a diverse range of challenges teachers face in the course of CSE instruction. The table below shows some of these challenges highlighted by Life Skills teachers in this study.

Table 7: Challenges Teachers Face in CSE Instruction

Challenge in CSE Instruction	TA	TB	TC	TD	TE	TF	TG	TH	TI	TJ	TK	TL	TM	TN
Students' shyness and discomfort	√	×	√	×	×	√	√	√	√	×	√	√	×	√
Teachers own negative perception	×	×	√	×	×	×	×	√	×	×	×	×	×	×
Inadequate teaching materials	×	√	×	√	×	×	×	×	×	√	×	×	×	×
Inconsistent teaching materials	×	×	×	×	√	×	×	×	×	×	√	×	×	×
Age-inappropriateness of the content	×	×	√	×	×	×	×	×	√	×	×	×	×	×
Linguistic and cultural barrier	×	×	×	√	×	×	×	×	×	√	×	×	×	×
Students' overexcitement	×	×	√	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	√	√

Key

√ = challenge cited by the teacher

× = challenge not cited by the teacher

4.5.1 Students' Shyness and Discomfort

As shown in Table 7 above, nine out of fourteen teachers cited students' shyness and discomfort as one of the significant challenges in the delivery of CSE in schools. Participants observed that this was noted, particularly among girls.

Teacher L, for example, explained:

The ones who are much comfortable are the boys and they enjoy the topic very much. Boys seem to feel more comfortable participating in discussions about sexuality, while girls are more hesitant (Teacher L, Dose Secondary School).

Teacher F, H and I shared similar sentiments and suggested that this may be due to cultural and religious norms. Teacher F, for example, stated:

Students are not open enough. They are shy-to shed more light on issues related to sexuality. More especially women and girls as they are culturally expected not talk much about sex (Teacher F, Ndevu CDSS).

Teacher H stated that students who are members of school's religious clubs or societies like School Christian Organizations (SCOM) and Young Christian Students (YCS) feel hesitant to openly discuss sexual topics for fear of being stigmatised by their friends. He explained:

Many students feel shy and hesitant to participate in CSE discussions. Those who are members of religious clubs or societies such as SCOM and YCS may be particularly concerned about the potential moral implications of discussing sexual topics, fearing that they may be seen as sinful (Teacher H, Maru Pvt.).

Similarly, Teacher I suggested that there is limited student participation for fear of being judged by their peers as open discussion on sexual matters is discouraged. He explained:

Most of the students do not participate because of fear of their friend to label them as the ones who do bad things about sex (Teacher I, Risema Pvt).

4.5.2 Teachers' Own Negative Perceptions

Another challenge teachers highlighted seemed to be related to teachers' own perceptions and the perceptions of others. Teacher H, for example, expressed concern about being viewed negatively by students:

It's like whenever you are talking about these things, they just feel like you are a womaniser, or Casanova somehow (Teacher H, Maru Pvt.).

This sentiment was echoed by Teacher C, who mentioned that other teachers avoid teaching topics deemed sexually sensitive because of the negative perceptions related to the sexuality topics. He stated:

I have seen some teachers asking their colleagues to teach such concepts on their behalf. When they are going to class, some teachers even comment, "tupita kokatukwana-tu uku" (now we are going to play with vulgar words). I have seen some teachers asking someone to teach sexually sensitive topics on their behalf (Teacher C, Kango CDSS).

Let it be pointed out that through the lens of the Cultural Schema Theory, Teacher H's fear of being labelled a "womaniser" or "Casanova" suggests the existence of a cultural schema that associates discussions about sexuality with immorality or inappropriate behaviour for teachers. This schema can create significant social and professional risks for teachers who engage in open discussions about sexuality (De Hass & Hutter, 2019).

On the other hand, Teacher C's observation that some teachers avoid teaching CSE by asking others to teach on their behalf suggests the existence of a cultural schema that emphasizes conformity to perceived norms and expectations. This finding reveals that teachers feel pressure to conform to these norms, even if it means avoiding important aspects of the curriculum, as stated by De Hass and Hutter (2019).

4.5.3 Inadequate Teaching Materials

Other participants cited limited availability of appropriate teaching materials, which they believe hinders effective instruction of CSE. Teacher B, for example, explained:

Yes, I one of the main challenges I see is the shortage of textbooks for teaching the subject effectively. Sometimes you find that you are using one or two textbooks in a class of many (Teachers D, Kango CDSS).

Teacher J shared the same sentiments, and underscored the critical need for age-appropriate visual aids and resources to address sensitive topics like that on reproduction. He stated:

Lack of teaching and learning resources showing internal sexual organs and their functions makes teaching a problem (Teacher J, Risema Pvt.).

The mention of textbook shortages by some participants strongly suggests a critical gap in the provision of essential teaching materials for CSE. As other studies have observed, the lack of resources can significantly impact the quality and effectiveness of CSE instruction (Naidoo & Chirwa, 2014).

4.5.4 Inconsistent Teaching Materials

Teacher K mentioned about the inconsistent teaching materials which create confusion and hinder effective learning. He noted:

The books do not match the content. You might get one book that presents information different from another. For example, the concept of Rabia Majora varies across textbooks. Some refer to them as the major lips, while others label them as minor lips. This inconsistency creates confusion among students (Teacher K, Dose Secondary School).

Teacher E also acknowledged the inconsistency of some Life Skills textbooks. However, he emphasized a broader concern: the lack of depth and comprehensiveness in the content. He explained:

Make it more comprehensive or deeper. For example, textbooks just mention monthly periods but they do not go deeper to explain what they are (Teacher E, Ndevu CDSS).

The inconsistency of some teaching materials highlights the need for having teaching materials that are in a well-developed state so that students receive accurate and consistent information (Kapur, 2022; Venketsamy, 2023). There is also a need for textbooks that go beyond basic definitions and provide in-depth explanations, examples, and real-world applications to enhance student understanding and critical thinking. When such things are not adequately addressed, it can be disadvantageous to the effectiveness of the overall CSE curriculum (Kapur, 2022).

4.5.5 Age-Inappropriateness of the CSE Content

Some participants in this study expressed concerns about the age appropriateness of CSE content. Particularly, this was raised by Teacher C and Teacher I from a CDSS and a private school respectively. These teachers suggested that certain topics, like those related to growth and development, be shifted from the junior to the senior level of secondary education. They cited that this is due to the fact that many students entering

secondary school are relatively young and may not fully understand or appreciate the concepts being taught. Teacher C explained:

Due to age, most schools are receiving Form Ones who are not yet adolescents. Therefore, topics on growth and development should be shifted to MCSE. Some students starting Form One are very young and may struggle to relate to their bodies (Teacher C, Kango CDSS).

Teacher I shared similar sentiments:

I would exclude the topic of sexuality from the junior level, perhaps moving it to the senior section. We are teaching young children who are not yet fully mature, which can affect their understanding of the content (Teacher I, Risema Pvt.).

It is imperative to mention, however, that although concerns of age appropriateness of the curriculum were raised in this study, UNESCO (2023) says that Life Skills Education course in Malawi was designed around principles of age-appropriateness, culture, and the local context in relation to topics, activities, case studies, and graphics. The teachers' concerns, however, agree with the findings of Obare et al. (2012) in Kenya who noted that attitudes toward CSE among some teachers were being influenced by debates surrounding the curriculum's content and its appropriateness for different age groups.

Such findings have prompted such scholars as Venketsamy (2023) and Mukau and Nichols (2024) to recommend that CSE programs be designed in a way that respects and considers the cultural and religious beliefs of specific societies in order to gain community acceptance.

4.5.6 Linguistic and Cultural Barriers

Other teachers highlighted the challenge posed by linguistic and cultural barriers in delivering CSE. This challenge was highlighted by one teacher from a CDSS and another from a private school. These teachers reported being asked the Chichewa equivalents of some sexual reproductive organs which they said puts them in an awkward situation during CSE instruction. Teacher J, for example, recalled:

I remember being asked to explain the meanings of clitoris, labia majora, and labia minora in Chichewa. Such demands come frequently from students (Teacher J, Risema Pvt.).

Teacher J explained that this can be particularly awkward for teachers, as open discussions about sexual anatomy are often considered taboo in many cultures. In Mukau and Nichols' (2024) study findings in Zimbabwe, CSE teachers also expressed discomfort discussing certain CSE topics due to cultural prohibitions and language barriers. They mentioned their unease with culturally sensitive terms such as those mentioned in this study.

It has been cited in this study that open discussions about sexual anatomy are often considered taboo in many cultures. As put by De Hass and Hutter (2019), teachers may, therefore, be hesitant to delve into sensitive topics, fearing social disapproval or parental backlash. This aligns with Nishida's (1999) Cultural Schema Theory which posits that cultural schemas can influence individual behaviour and decision making.

According to Venketsamy (2023), such challenges underscore the need for ongoing professional development and supportive school environments to facilitate effective CSE instruction.

4.5.7 Students' Overexcitement

Some participants in this study revealed that CSE can be exciting to students, for they become visibly curious when some of the topics are being discussed. This was observed by three teachers in this study. One was from a Community Day Secondary School, one from a conventional secondary school and another from a private school.

Teacher C, for example, noted:

Interestingly, when we teach these topics, even the most passive students become attentive and eager to listen. You see that excitement you don't see when you are teaching other subjects (Teacher C, Kango CDSS).

Although this heightened interest can be a positive indicator, suggesting that students are curious and engaged, Teacher M, seemed to caution:

While student excitement is often evident, it doesn't always translate to genuine understanding. Sometimes, they become overly enthusiastic about certain topics, but when assessed, they struggle to demonstrate comprehension of the concepts (Teacher M, Chava Secondary).

Teacher N had a similar observation as Teacher M, adding that students may sometimes ask irrelevant questions to gain attention and disrupt the lesson. She observed:

What I have observed is that students become very excited when you are teaching topics about sex and sometimes, they like asking irrelevant questions, not related to the syllabus which divert the attention of the whole lesson (Teacher N, Pemba Pvt.).

It is important to mention here that according to Zinyane (2022), while it may be sometimes challenging to manage these discussions, it is a positive indication that

learners want to grasp the content. As suggested by Speizer et al. (2020), these concerns highlight the need for Life Skills teachers to be using appropriate classroom management techniques such as careful observation and assessment to ensure that student excitement is accompanied by meaningful learning.

4.6 Teachers' Navigation of Sexually Sensitive Questions

4.6.1 Most Commonly Asked Sexuality Questions

The findings of this study show that there is a diverse range of sexually sensitive questions students pose to their teachers. These questions, as it will be seen in the excerpts below, reflect common misconceptions and curiosities students have about sexuality. Teachers from all school types involved in this study reported being asked sexually sensitive questions. For example, Teacher C reported being asked:

"Is it true that girls do not get impregnated when they have sex while swimming?" and "Is it true that girls do not get pregnant if they wash their vagina soon after sex?" (Teacher C, Kango CDSS).

A critical look at these questions reveals that students need accurate information about sexual reproduction and contraception.

Teacher K also received questions that highlighted students' need for comprehensive information on sexual reproduction and contraception. He recalled being asked:

"What happens when the penis goes inside the vagina?", "How long can someone get pregnant?" and "How can you know that the condom has broken during sexual intercourse? How can someone know that they have contracted HIV after sleeping with someone?" (Teacher K, Dose Secondary).

Questions that suggest that students are curious about physical changes during puberty and the development of sexual desire were reported by teacher E. He stated being asked:

"Why do girls grow hips?" and "Do girls have sexual feelings?" (Teacher E, Ndevu CDSS).

Teacher L and F, from Dose Secondary School and Ndevu CDSS respectively, reported being asked questions that indicate that students are interested in issues surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, Teacher L reported that students wanted to find out from her how "homosexuals do sex" while Teacher F reported that students wanted to know from him if "people involved in LGBT activities are wrong".

Teacher H once received questions about physical attributes and sexual function that reveal common misconceptions and myths. He explained being asked:

"Is it true that slim girls have big holes (vaginas)" and "Is it true that fat ladies produce more vaginal fluid than slim girls?" (Teacher H, Maru Pvt.).

As for teacher N, she recalled being asked two questions, one in which students wanted to know about some of the cultural practices that happen during initiation ceremonies and the other related to sexual intercourse experiences. She recalled students asking her:

"What is that they cut during the female genital mutilation process" and "What happens for a man to be weak after releasing sperms" (Teacher N, St. Pemba Pvt.).

Other teachers stated in this study that they did not directly receive sexually sensitive questions from students but observed indirect cues of students' interest when sexuality topics are being discussed. For instance, Teacher M noted that he has seen students in

his class arguing against abstinence messages, visibly disagreeing with the information they are told. He explained:

There are times that you are saying, at your age you are not supposed to have sex, you are not supposed to do ABCD (referring to dos and don'ts), and you will hear the class murmuring in argument of the point. Like you are telling them what is not supposed to be. So, I have been encountering things like those, but not really receiving sensitive questions from them (Teacher M, Chava Secondary).

These findings are confirming what other scholars have observed that teachers are often seen as trusted figures by young people (Ollis & Meldrum, 2008, as cited in Lynagh et al., 2010) and as such, they are frequently approached with health-related and sensitive questions, including those about sexuality. These findings strongly suggest a need for CSE programs that address a wide range of sexuality topics. As suggested by Mahoso and Finestone (2023), such programs should be age-appropriate, evidence-based, and delivered by well-trained teachers in a safe and supportive environment.

4.6.2 Teachers Responses to Sexually Sensitive Questions

Teachers in this study indicated that some questions are answered publicly, in front of the class, while the more personal or complex questions may be addressed privately. While other teachers seemed to require additional time to research a question, others engaged students in a class discussion to explore the topic together. The following are some of the participants' excerpts:

Teacher K:

I do interact. I do answer them. Unless maybe I have received a question which needs consultation. I tell them I may give them the answer later (Teacher K, Dose Secondary).

Teacher C:

I usually request them to give me more time for research. I respond to such questions in the next lesson (Teacher C, Kango CDSS).

Teacher N:

I tell them if I know the answer. If I don't, I also tell them (Teacher N, Pemba Pvt.).

Teacher G:

I Involve learners themselves to come up with the answers themselves. I throw back the question to students (Teacher G, Maru Pvt.).

As found in this study that some teachers choose to address sexually sensitive questions privately, studies have suggested that this approach aligns with cultural norms that discourage openly discussing sexual matters (De Hass & Hutter, 2019). It can be deduced from these findings that broader cultural contexts shape teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the teaching of CSE within the context of Life Skills Education, a notion Nishida's (1999) Cultural Schema Theory exactly espouses.

Since teachers play a crucial role in creating a safe and supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics (Francis, 2011; Chavula, Zulu & Hurting, 2022), these study findings are underscoring the need for standardised teacher trainings and Continuous Professional Developments (CPDs) for Life Skills

teachers for them to be equipped on how they can be addressing the diverse needs and interests of students (Venketsamy, 2023).

4.7 Life Skills Teachers' Preparedness to Teach CSE

In this study, it was established that none of all Life Skills teachers had the tertiary education required to teach the subject, including CSE. While these teachers were qualified in other subjects, they lacked specialised training in Life Skills education. While others reported that they had once attended an in-service training or had a background in related fields, others suggested the need for additional training to effectively teach CSE. Most of these teachers cited that they had begun teaching Life Skills due to staffing shortages and felt sufficiently qualified based on their previous training.

Teacher C, for example, stated:

Yes, I am fully equipped. Luckily enough I attended a certain training by Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) on HIV and sexual reproduction and I keep on studying. I am a trained humanities teacher and I therefore teach life skills
(Teacher C, Kango CDSS).

Teacher D shared similar sentiments and added that he felt having sufficient knowledge in the subject because one of the courses he did at university level was Educational Psychology which tackles issues to do with human physical changes and development. He explained:

I feel like I am fully trained to teach the subject though I have not majored the subject. I did life skills training at Teachers Training College (TTC) so I feel I am equipped. When I was a primary school teacher, I also attended training on Sexual Health and Reproduction by Family Health International (FHI) and

Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM). This is in addition to Educational Psychology I did during my bachelor's degree programme where we also look at human growth and development (Teacher D, Kango CDSS).

Teacher E acknowledged the gap in his training and emphasized the need for specialised training to effectively teach Life Skills, particularly CSE. He reported that the in-service training he once attended, organised by Forum for African Women Educationalists in Malawi (FAWEMA), focused on general teaching methodologies rather than specific skills relevant to Life Skills. He stated:

I started teaching Life Skills because of the inadequacy of teachers. We don't have a teacher who has specialized in Life Skills. I have attended one training by FAWEMA but they were teaching the normal teaching methodology. But I still need to be equipped with special skills that suit life skills teaching (Teacher E, Ndevu CDSS).

Teacher H, from Maru Private, reported that he started teaching Life Skills because of the shortage of teachers specialising in Life Skills but felt qualified to teach CSE in Life Skills because he had “read a lot of books”.

Teachers A, N and L recognized the importance of specialised training. They explained:

I am not fully equipped or trained because I specialized in Geography and theology. I need an in-service training (Teacher A, Koka CDSS).

I am not fully equipped. I can become fully equipped if am given a chance to attend special training on CSE (Teacher N, Pemba Pvt.).

Though I teach the subject, I just feel like someone needs to be fully trained so that they are able to deliver the concepts better (Teacher L, Dose Secondary).

Teacher I was assigned to teach Life Skills due to the perception that students would feel more comfortable discussing sensitive topics with a younger teacher. However, he also recognised the need for specialized training:

No, I need to be trained on how best I can teach sensitive topics. Just because of my age I was given Life Skills so that students will be free to ask sensitive questions (Teacher I, Risema Pvt.).

As mentioned earlier, these findings are suggesting that despite their qualifications in other subjects, teachers teaching Life Skills within which CSE is embedded lack the specialised knowledge and skills necessary for effective delivery of the content. This indicates that even if the CSE curriculum in Malawi is well-designed, as argued by UNESCO (2023), its potential impact is significantly compromised by the lack of teacher preparedness. This deficiency undermines the quality of sexual health education and potentially leaves young people vulnerable to misinformation and risky behaviors (Mukau & Nichols, 2024).

Similar studies have also identified the lack of competent teachers equipped with the necessary skills to deliver CSE effectively. For example, studies across different countries, including Australia, South Africa, and Malawi, have highlighted teachers' deficiencies in understanding the content and methodologies of CSE (Banda, 2020, as cited in Mukau & Nichols, 2024).

This finding suggests a clear need for specialised training for teachers who teach CSE for the successful implementation of the programme. Francis (2010, as cited in Venketsamy, 2023), has argued that preparing teachers with substantial pedagogical content knowledge and developing a critical consciousness is vital for successful teaching in sexuality education.

Venketsamy (2023) has opined that educators' level of comfort and confidence in teaching sexuality education depends on their level of knowledge. Helleve et al. (2009) suggest that by providing teachers with positive and supportive training, we can foster a more positive outlook on CSE and enhance their ability to deliver quality instruction.

4.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a discussion of teachers' beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of CSE in Life Skills education. The findings suggest that while teachers generally viewed CSE positively, their perceived importance and teaching approaches varied. The findings have also shown that teachers fell into three groups: those avoiding topics, those injecting personal beliefs, and those presenting objectively. Challenges included student shyness, inadequate materials, and lack of teacher training. Diverse handling of sensitive questions and cultural barriers were also noted, highlighting the need for improved training and curriculum. The study's conclusions and implications are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a summary of the study findings, conclusions, implications and suggested areas for further research.

5.1 Summary of Study Findings

This study aimed to explore teachers' beliefs, value systems and practices regarding the teaching of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Life Skills education in secondary schools in Dowa district. The study was situated within an interpretive paradigm and a qualitative phenomenological research design was employed to understand teachers' subjective experiences of teaching CSE. Thematic data analysis was used to analyse data collected from fourteen Life Skills teachers through open-ended questionnaires and individual interviews. Teachers' beliefs, values and practices were discussed through the lens of Nishida's (1999) Cultural Schema Theory.

This study had six key findings. Firstly, teachers had positive attitudes towards the teaching of CSE in schools despite their varied perspectives on the significance of CSE within the school setting. Secondly, three distinct teacher categories emerged based on the interplay between their personal beliefs and CSE delivery. While some teachers avoided teaching certain sexuality concepts due to their cultural and religious beliefs, others covered all aspects of CSE as outlined in the Life Skills curriculum but inserted their own personal beliefs and values into the instruction. A third group disregarded their personal beliefs and presented CSE content objectively.

Thirdly, the study revealed a range of teaching methods employed by teachers, with some preferring learner-centered approaches and others preferring more traditional methods like lecturing. Fourthly, several challenges were identified in teachers' CSE instruction, including student shyness and discomfort, particularly among girls; teachers' own negative perceptions of CSE; inadequate and inconsistent teaching materials; age-inappropriateness of the curriculum; and linguistic and cultural barriers in CSE delivery.

Fifthly, the handling of sexually sensitive questions varied among teachers, with some responding right in front of the class, while others privately. Then, there were those who reported asking for more time to find out before providing feedback to students. Finally, the study found that none of the teachers had received specialised training in the teaching of Life Skills through which CSE is taught.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following are some of the conclusions that have been made:

5.2.1 Teachers have Positive Attitudes towards CSE

The findings of this study have shown that teachers had positive attitudes towards CSE, despite having varying viewpoints on its significance in schools. They seemed to share a common understanding that CSE plays a crucial role in empowering students. They had indicated, among others, that CSE helps young people navigate the complexities of sexuality and make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

This has made this study to conclude that there is a potential shift in teachers' cultural schemas regarding sexuality. Teachers' growing awareness of social and health challenges facing young people, such as high rates of STIs and teenage pregnancies,

might have prompted re-evaluation of their traditional, more restrictive attitudes towards sex education.

5.2.2 Teachers' Beliefs and Values Significantly Influence CSE Delivery

The study clearly demonstrates that teachers' personal beliefs and values play a crucial role in how they approach CSE. These beliefs, shaped by cultural and religious norms, lead to variations in the extent to which CSE is taught, particularly topics such as LGBT and condom use. While some teachers avoid teaching such sensitive topics, others insert their beliefs and values into the instruction. As other studies have done, this study has suggested the need for tertiary level training and continuous professional development programmes that may help teachers to self-reflect on their own personal biases on CSE instruction.

5.2.3 Diverse Teaching Approaches and the Need for Professional Development

The findings of this study have shown a diverse range of teaching methods used by teachers, from learner-centered approaches to more traditional methods. While learner-centered approaches are generally considered more effective for sensitive topics like CSE, the study suggests that many teachers may benefit from the Continuous Professional Developments (CPDs) on the effective pedagogical approaches for CSE. Such training programmes ought to emphasise on engaging and interactive methods that create a safe and supportive learning environment for students.

5.2.4 Addressing Challenges in CSE Implementation

The study identified several significant challenges affecting the effective CSE delivery in schools, including student shyness, teacher discomfort, inadequate resources, and cultural barriers. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach. This

may include providing teachers with adequate resources, including age-appropriate and culturally sensitive teaching materials. Creating a supportive school environment that encourages open dialogue about sexuality is also crucial.

5.2.5 The Critical Need for Tertiary Level Teacher Training

One key concern this study has established is that none of the Life Skills teachers had a tertiary level qualification to effectively teach the subject through which CSE is taught. However, as other studies have cited, effective CSE delivery requires teachers to have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to address sensitive topics with students. It has been suggested in the study that investing in comprehensive tertiary level teacher training programs for Life Skills would be essential to improve the quality of CSE instruction and ensure that students receive accurate and unbiased information.

5.3 Implications of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, the following are the implications for both policy and practice:

5.3.1 Implication for Secondary School Teacher Training Institutions

5.3.1.1 Tertiary Level Training for Life Skills Teachers

The findings of this study have shown that despite having qualifications in other fields, Life Skills teachers do not have the required qualifications to teach the subject, through which CSE is taught. Therefore, secondary school teacher training institutions must consider offering tertiary-level training for Life Skills teachers for them to be equipped with necessary knowledge and skills for teaching CSE which has sensitive topics.

5.3.2 Implications for the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is a key driver of policy reform in Education. Therefore, it may wish to take into consideration the following implications

with the view of ensuring successful implementation of the CSE curriculum in the country:

5.3.2.1 Regular Continuous Professional Development Programmes

Although the study found out that some teachers reported having attended in-service training for teaching CSE, it was observed that such trainings focused only on general teaching methods, not on specific Life Skills teaching methods and particularly, on the practical approaches specific to CSE. As such, the ministry must consider conducting regular CPD programmes for Life Skills teachers to be kept updated on the latest developments in the field, including evidence-based approaches to CSE.

5.3.2.2 Developing Age-appropriate, Culturally Sensitive CSE Curriculum

Since one of the concerns in the study was that students being selected for secondary education may not be old enough for the sensitivity of the sexuality topics, the ministry should prioritize the development of comprehensive CSE curricula that are age-appropriate and culturally sensitive in order to increase stakeholders' acceptance.

5.3.2.3 Allocation of Adequate and Consistent Teaching Materials

The study revealed significant shortcomings in the use of Life Skills textbooks for CSE. These textbooks were found to be insufficient and provided inconsistent information on sexuality. This lack of resources directly impacts the quality and effectiveness of CSE instruction. To address these issues, the ministry must prioritize the allocation of adequate teaching and learning resources. Furthermore, the inconsistency observed in some Life Skills textbooks underscores the urgent need for the ministry to establish a standardized curriculum and a list of approved textbooks. This will ensure that all students receive accurate and consistent information on sexuality.

5.3.3 Implication for the Independent Schools Association of Malawi

5.3.3.1 The Need for Adequate Resources and CPDs in Private Schools

The Independent Schools Association of Malawi (ISAMA), a representative body for private schools within the country, should also ensure that its member schools have adequate Life Skills teaching and learning materials for effective delivery of the curriculum. Additionally, ISAMA should also ensure that its teachers are attending professional development opportunities for them to be updated on the latest developments in the field, including evidence-based approaches to CSE.

5.3.4 Implications for Life Skills Teachers and School Administrators

5.3.3.1 Creation of Safe and Inclusive School Environments

Life Skills teachers and school administrators should be able to create a safe and inclusive school environment where open dialogue around sexual matters can be encouraged.

5.4 Areas for further research

To further contribute to deeper understanding of the factors affecting the implementation of CSE in schools, further research may also be needed to understand the following:

- Students and parents' perceptions of the teaching of sexuality education in secondary schools. Understanding students' and parents' perceptions is crucial because their perspectives directly influence the acceptance and effectiveness of CSE. Parental concerns and student anxieties can create barriers to implementation. Further research can reveal specific misconceptions, cultural sensitivities, and information gaps that need to be addressed to tailor CSE programs effectively.

- Effective strategies for parents and community engagements in discussions about CSE and addressing their concerns. Engaging parents and the wider community is essential for building support and addressing concerns related to CSE. Research should focus on identifying effective strategies for fostering open dialogue and collaboration.
- The role of school leadership in creating a supportive environment for the effective delivery of CSE in schools. School leadership plays a pivotal role in creating a supportive environment for effective CSE delivery. Research is needed to explore how school leaders can champion CSE, provide adequate resources, and address teacher training needs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Teachers' Questionnaire

This questionnaire seeks to understand teachers' beliefs value systems and practices regarding the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in Life Skills Education. Do not write your name anywhere on the questionnaire. You only need to express your views sincerely.

A. Background information

Name of school _____ Teacher's given code _____

Gender _____ Teaching experience _____

Area of Specialisation _____

B. Teachers' Perception of the Teaching of CSE

1. In your opinion, do you think the teaching of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in schools is important? Explain your answer.

C. The Influence of Cultural Morality Frameworks on Teaching of CSE

2. Do you feel comfortable teaching CSE within life skills lessons? If not, why?
3. Do you think cultural and religious beliefs influence you not to teach some aspects of comprehensive sexuality education? If yes, what are these cultural or religious beliefs?

D. The Impact of Teachers' Belief Systems on the Inclusion of CSE Content in Lessons

4. Do you ever leave out any content of sexuality education when teaching to learners due to your personal beliefs?

5. If yes, what topics do you exclude?

E. CSE Instructional Practices in Class and challenges Faced

6. What teaching strategies do you often use when delivering CSE content within your Life Skills lessons? Why do you prefer these strategies?

7. What are other problems, if any, you encounter in your teaching of CSE within Life skills education?

F. How Teachers Navigate and Address Sexually Sensitive Questions During Lessons

8. Have you ever received sexually sensitive questions from students when delivering CSE content during your Life Skills lessons? If yes, what are these questions, specifically?

9. What strategies do you use when you want to respond to sexually sensitive questions from students during lessons?

G. Teachers' Preparedness to Teach effectively CSE

10. Do you think you are fully equipped/trained to teach CSE? If not, what do you think should be done to make you fully equipped?

11. How did you end up teaching Life Skills in secondary school?

End of Questionnaire

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS

Study Title

Secondary School Teachers' beliefs and value systems regarding the teaching of Comprehensive Sexuality Education within the context of Life Skills Education.

Introduction

I am Michael Banda, a Masters of Education in Educational Psychology student at the University of Malawi. I am requesting you to consent and take part in the above-mentioned study. I have selected you to take part in the study because you are a secondary school Life Skills teacher.

Research purpose and procedure

The study seeks to explore secondary school teachers' beliefs and value systems regarding the teaching of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Within the context of Life Skills Education. The study will involve answering an open-ended questionnaire and in-depth interview which will be audio-recorded so that I capture exactly every vital information.

Possible risks and discomfort

Given the sensitive nature of the topics involving sexuality, there may be some discomfort in responding to some of the questions. If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, you may choose to stop the interview or decline to answer specific question. If you will need further counselling, this researcher will refer you to a counsellor. Unforeseen events



may also arise during the interview. The researcher is committed to addressing them ethically and prioritise your well being.

Confidentiality

Any information provided will not be shared to anyone to maintain confidentiality. There are no any material benefits as a result of your participation in the study, but the results will be disseminated for the benefit of the public, educators and the policy makers.

Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose not to continue participating in this study at any time you want. By giving an informed consent to participate in the study, you are requested to sign this consent form.

Potential benefits of the study

There are no any material benefits as a result of your participation in the study, but the results will be disseminated for the benefit of the public, educators and the policy makers.

Contacts

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact me on 0991000200 or on 0888173261; my supervisor, Dr. Symon Chiziwa, University of Malawi, P.O. Box 280, Zomba; or Dr Victoria Ndolo, Chairperson of University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC), P.O. Box 280, Zomba. +265 995 0427 60

I _____ have understood the nature of the study and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.



Appendix 3: UNIMAREC Approval



VICE-CHANCELLOR
Prof. Samson M.I. Sajidu,
BSc MEd, MPhil Cantab, PhD MEd

Connect with Excellence

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
P.O. Box 280, Zomba, Malawi
TEL: (265) 111 624 222
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EMAIL: vc@unima.ac.mw

Our Ref: P.05/24/388

Your Ref:

23rd July 2024

Mr Michael Banda
MED Psychology
University of Malawi.
P.O. Box 280.
Zomba.

Email: michale med-psy-01-22@unima.ac.mw

Dear Mr Banda

RESEARCH ETHICS AND REGULATORY APPROVAL AND PERMIT FOR PROTOCOL NO. P.05/24/388. SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND VALUE SYSTEMS REGARDING THE TEACHING OF COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION.

Having satisfied all the relevant ethical and regulatory requirements, I am pleased to inform you that the above-referred research protocol has officially been approved. You are now permitted to proceed with its implementation. Should there be any amendments to the approved protocol in the course of implementing it, you shall be required to seek approval of such amendments before implementation of the same.

This approval is valid for **one year** from the date of issuance of this approval. If the study goes beyond one year, an annual approval for continuation shall be required to be sought from the University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC) in a format that is available at the Secretariat.

Once the study is finalized, you are required to furnish the Committee and the Vice Chancellor with a final report of the study. The committee reserves the right to carry out a compliance inspection of this approved protocol at any time as may be deemed by

it. As such, you are expected to properly maintain all study documents including consent forms.

UNIMAREC wishes you a successful implementation of your study.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr Victoria Ndolo
CHAIRPERSON OF UNIMAREC

CC: Vice Chancellor
Registrar
Director of Finance and Investments
Head of Research
UNIMAREC Administrator
UNIMAREC Compliance Officer



Appendix 4: School Administrators' Letter of Consent

I _____ (the headteacher) allow teachers of this school to participate in the study. I understand that the real name of the school and the real teachers names will not be used anywhere in the study, and that their responses will be treated confidentially. I also understand that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact me on 0991000200 or on 0888173261; my supervisor, Dr. Symon Chiziwa, University of Malawi, P.O. Box 280, Zomba or Dr Victoria Ndolo, Chairperson of University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC), P.O. Box 280, Zomba. +265 995 0427 60

Signature _____ Date _____

